Investigating the 'multiethnolectality' of MLE as expressed in grime lyrics

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Sammendrag

Denne masteroppgaven er en kvalitativ studie med kvantitative elementer. Oppgaven har som mål å undersøke hvorvidt og eventuelt hvordan det multi-etnolektalske aspektet ved Multicultural London English (heretter 'MLE') kommer til uttrykk i grime-musikk. MLE er en sosiolekt som i britiske medier blant annet har blitt omtalt som 'Jafaican' ('fake Jamaican') grunnet sine antatte jamaikanske røtter i London. Lingvistisk forskning har påvist at MLE er et mye mer sammensatt fenomen som består av afrikanske, sørøst-asiatiske, karibiske varianter av engelsk. Som multietnolekt brukes MLE på ganske lik linje av mange ungdommer i London (særlig fra arbeiderklassebakgrunn), uavhengig av nasjonal og lingvistisk bakgrunn og språk i hjemmet. Denne oppgaven har som mål å undersøke om en talers nasjonalitet (hovedsakelig foreldrenes eller tidligere generasjoners nasjonalitet) påvirker hvordan taleren bruker lingvistiske elementer fra det dominerende språkbildet i det landet som talerens foreldre (eller tidligere generasjoner) stammer fra. Mer spesifikt tar oppgaven for seg fem språktrekk fra jamaikansk engelsk og britisk kreol som også er i bruk i MLE.

Videre undersøkes talemønstrene til seks informanter av ulike lingvistiske bakgrunner. Informantene er grime-kollektivet Boy Better Know, et musikkollektiv basert i nord-London. Tre av informantene har jamaikansk bakgrunn, to er brødre med nigeriansk bakgrunn, og én har trinidadisk bakgrunn. En sentral hypotese er at de tre informantene som har jamaikansk bakgrunn *ikke* vil bruke de fem typisk jamaikanske språktrekkene oftere enn de øvrige informantene, men at det er andre faktorer som spiller inn på hvor frekvent en taler av MLE bruker spesifikke språktrekk.

For å finne ut av dette har jeg tatt for meg både planlagt og ikke-planlagt tale, og analysert om en taler som hyppig bruker de fem jamaikanske språktrekkene i sine sangtekster bruker de samme elementene like frekvent i dagligtalen. Ved hjelp av analyse av de seks informantenes sangtekster parallelt med intervjuer med informantene, konkluderer denne oppgaven med at det er faktorer som *identitet* og *legitimering* som bestemmer hvorvidt og

eventuelt hvor ofte grime-MCer – og sannsynligvis også andre MLE-talere – tar i bruk spesifikke språklige trekk. Dette gjør seg gjeldende i minst tre tendenser: 1) at det er en av de to informantene med nigeriansk bakgrunn som hyppigst bruker jamaikanske/kreolske trekk i sine sangtekster; 2) at den nevnte informantens bror bruker de samme trekkene i betraktelig mindre grad; og 3) at de seks informantene totalt sett bruker nær null jamaikansk/ kreol i intervjusituasjoner.

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1. Introduction

Couple rappers need to work on their patois still

Frisco (BigFris) on Twitter (Frisco 2017)

Before you end up on the sex offenders list
Manna gon' put the devil in the dirt
Wah gwan for certain man

Skepta – *Nasty* (2015)

Any time I reach gyal, I'm ringing the alarm
Everyting calm
Been a soundman from the day I was born

Wiley – *Skillzone* (2013)

Having been the capital of the modern world's largest empire, and as an indirect result being populated by people from such diverse corners of the world as Bangladesh, Trinidad and Nigeria, London as a city represents a wide variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds (London Datastore 2016). The plentiful and quite diverse cultures of the numerous regions represented in London's wide spectrum of diasporas have not only made an impact on London culture, but also considerably changed and reshaped the language spoken by many Londoners (Fox 2015, Sutcliffe 1982, Rampton 1995, 1998). Influences from foreign languages and global Englishes are perhaps the most prominent in the language of contemporary adolescent speakers, who in recent years have tended to adopt a sociolect – or rather multiethnolect – that has been referred to as Multicultural London English, or MLE

(Fox 2015, Green 2014). The three qutes aboveare examples of how MLE's impact on the speech patterns of a substantial group of young Londoners is exhibited in popular culture, which will be the focus of this thesis.

Multicultural London English is, as the name suggests, a product of multiculturalism and could for some readers or listeners be viewed as an identity marker attributed to ethnicity or national heritage, as its origins appear to be strongly rooted in Caribbean – and particularly Jamaican – varieties of English. It therefore appears "black" or "Jamaican" to some listeners. British media coined the term 'Jafaican'/'Jafaikan' in 2006 (Kerswill 2014, Green 2014). However, MLE features can be detected in speakers from any area of, and also outside, Greater London, and according to contemporary sociolinguists MLE is widespread among speakers that do not necessarily have any biological heritage in the areas from which MLE tendencies originate. This tendency must be attributed to an essential value of human language use and one of the core topics within sociolinguistics: *identity* (in this case identity beyond ethnic, national and cultural background). MLE is also a product of *adolescence* and is used as an identity marker for young Londoners – and, by extension, other speakers in Great Britain – in order to signalize youth and youth culture as a whole.

An important driving force for youth culture – and, as a result, youth language – is popular music, and perhaps the most prominent music genre to originate in London during the last few decades is *grime*, a genre that is difficult to describe accurately due to a wide variety of origins. Grime can be viewed as an offshoot of UK garage and Caribbean dancehall, fused with influences from American hip-hop. Lyrics tend to be more down-to-earth and every-day than modern American rap whose primary topics traditionally have been money, sex, fame and (supposed) crime (Vice 2015). In relation with this, Joan C. Beal (2009) points to Arctic Monkeys as an example of a recent trend within modern British indie rock music. This trend points towards a retreat from typically American English linguistic features in song lyrics and bases her hypothesis on the theory of *enregisterment*. Beal poses a question that bears resonance not only in indie rock terms, but possibly also in grime:

> If Arctic Monkeys avoid "American" pronunciations and instead employ features of their local accent and dialect, is this because the former have become associated with

> mainstream pop music whilst the latter index independence and authenticity? (2009:223-4)

The independence and authenticity that Beal mentions here might relate to grime's possible however illusive similarity with American hip hop. Although grime music might be to some extent influenced by American hip hop, the linguistic registers used in the two genres appear to be quite far apart. Grime lyrics incorporate 'real' topics delivered in a 'real' language that can easily be understood and related to by young Londoners and other young English people on a personal level, as opposed to playing on the larger-than-life attitudes that have been instrumental in the success of a number of contemporary American rap acts (Kubrin 2005). In contrast, descriptions of social media interaction between friends and acquaintances, street-level feuds between gangs, and appraisal of family members, among others, are central topics in grime. A significant part of grime's recent success may be attributed to the fact that the language of the music is a language that is living and breathing, not only among a select group of people (e.g. Black Caribbean) but is widespread beyond this demographic.

Caribbean creoles, and particularly Jamaican English, linguistic features are present in lyrics of grime rappers of all backgrounds, which is what this study will attempt to illustrate. Jamaican influences are visible and traceable within a wide range of linguistic features of MLE: vocabulary, grammar, morphology, spelling and pronunciation are all – to varying degrees – touched by influences from Jamaican Patois, Jamaican English and British Creole. This study will maintain its focus on the two former categories – vocabulary and grammar – and will limit its focus to one particular grime crew. The artists in question are the North London grime collective Boy Better Know, consisting of rappers of various national and cultural backgrounds, from Jamaica to Nigeria via Trinidad and Tobago, the common link being north/east London. As the national heritages of each Boy Better Know rapper differ, the following chapters will investigate to which extent these factors color the rappers' language(s) in their lyrics. The study is *qualitative* in nature in that it discusses ambiguities in the data and points to possible factors behind these ambiguities. However, the methods behind my investigation will be *quantitative* in that I will present frequencies of

Jamaican English entries in each rapper's vocabulary and grammar. Note that this study will exclusively focus on Boy Better Know members' own mixtapes, extended plays and full-length albums, and will not include features on recordings from outside artists.

The research question for this study will be 'To what degree do grime lyrics illustrate and confirm the multiethnolectality of MLE, specifically relating to Jamaican English vocabulary and grammar?'. 'Grime lyrics' will here be limited to the lyrics of the Boy Better Know members, a group that has been chosen because of two main factors: 1) the group is reasonably sized for this genre of quantitative study; and 2) the group's members are of diverse ethnic and cultural background, and the group is therefore suitable for shedding light on the research question.

Prior to displaying the findings of the quantitative investigation of the lyrics' Jamaican or Jamaican-rooted units, I will proceed to explaining the methodology and frameworks behind the quantitative study. Thereafter I will provide context in the shape of previous linguistic research on multiethnolects and identity, MLE and its Jamaican, etc. origins, and grime music as a quintessentially 'London' phenomenon. Following the presentation of the findings from my investigation, I will discuss them in the framework of 'MLE as a multiethnolect', a topic that has been under scrutiny in both linguistic research and British print media, albeit under different labels – being compared to and discussed in relation to "slang" and "Cockney" – and under a variety of names, including "Black British English" and "Jafaican" (Kerswill 2014).

2. Background research

2.1.Multiethnolect and identity

In a number of cities in Western Europe, ethnic minorities (and, as research has shown, even members of ethnic majorities) can be found to use dialects which do not necessarily represent their ethnic, cultural and linguistic origins. These sociolects or ethnolects go beyond ethnicity and nationality in that they represent a 'minority' identiy as a collective, despite the lects' users' familial and cultural inheritance ranging from vastly diverse parts of the globe. The term 'multiethnolect' was coined by Clyne (2000) and has grown to become a generally accepted term in socio- and ethnolinguistic research. However, research on multiethnolectal phenomena dates to the late 20th century, and Rampton refers to what Roger Hewitt in 1989 described as ""a new ethnically mixed 'community English' created from the fragments" of a range of language varieties", based on the latter's research in South London in the 1970s and 80s (Rampton 1995:128).

During the last three decades, studies on multiethnolects have been carried out in a number of Western European countries, including Denmark (Quist 2008), Sweden (Quist 2008), Norway (Svendsen & Røyneland 2008), and Germany (Freywald, Mayr, Özçelik & Wiese 2011). A common finding in these studies is that multiethnolects are products of contact between people of diverse immigrant backgrounds, resulting in creole crossings (Rampton 1995). A result of this is, as Sebba (1997:225) states, a considerable number of speakers base their language on basilectal creoles, borrowing vocabulary terms, morphosyntactic features and pronunciation tendencies from a currently creolized variety of the target language. An instrumental driving force behind this trend is *minority identity*: In urban areas to which immigration occurs in a large number of waves of vastly diverse origin, minority groups are – as a result – plentiful and diverse. Densely populated urban districts are the homes of groups of people that have little else in common than being ethnic minorities, and as a result tend to find a sense of collective belonging and unity precisely in

identifying as minorities. In the particular case of MLE, it should be seen as an extension of how London Jamaican functioned as a collective identity marker not only for immigrants of Jamaican background, but to 'black' English people of various Caribbean backgrounds (Sebba 1997:232).

Multiethnolects can also function as an identity marker relating to the speakers' *age*. Comparable to the cases of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the United States, MLE functions as an identity marker for London *youth*, and can be seen to carry covert prestige among adolescents, regardless of ethnicity or background. The language variety has historically been frowned upon by parents and schools, in later years possibly due to negative media attention. As an example of the latter, historian David Starkey exclaimed in the aftermath of the 2011 London riots that "the whites have become black", describing how 'black' London youth culture had unified the cities' youngsters in an increasingly fashionable "destructive, nihilistic gangster culture" (BBC 2011). Whether or not one agrees with Starkey's rather controversial claims, the notion of 'black' being viewed as fashionable beyond ethnicities appears to carry weight in terms of London youngsters' language. Although MLE's origins are multiple and diverse, 'black' sources have proven to be favorable in terms of fashion, Jamaican being one of the most prevalent contributors (Green 2014:70). 'Black' English appears to simply be cooler. At the same time, this tendency is far from always welcome among black speakers. Ben Rampton's 1980s research on attitudes among black Londoners towards Anglo use of non-Anglo or 'black' speech patterns showed antagonism towards white or non-native use of Creole. Rampton's research specifically related to Asian Creole/Panjabi/Indian English, but this antagonism appears to be applicable towards white usage of Jamaican/Caribbean Creole as well (Edwards 1982:121-2).

2.2.Grime music

The music genre known as *grime* sprung out of London in the early 2000s in the aftermath of a wave of worldwide popularity surrounding its predecessor, 2-step, a sub-genre of UK garage (pronounced /ˈgærɪdʒ/, not /gəˈrɑːʒ/ – the latter pronunciation would be frowned upon by the insider (Frisco 2012)). The latter music style can be traced back to old-school jungle and drum & bass and is dominated by syncopated 4/4 beats and 'chopped' or pitch-shifted vocal or instrumental samples. 2-step as a sub-genre of UK garage is characterized by more experimental rhythm patterns and has been regarded as the instrumental forefather of grime instrumentals. A prominent example of the close relationship between 2-step music and early grime instrumentals can be heard in Wiley's 2004 track *Eskimo*. Vocals in both 2-step and UK grime in general are sparse, and, more often than not, the vocals are performed by women and then altered in terms of pitch and tempo.

The emergence of rapping on top of grime instrumentals can be attributed to the role of the *MC* in UK garage music and can be tracked back to Jamaican dancehall traditions. The role of the MC in typically instrumental electronic music genres such as UK garage, 2-step and jungle is perhaps fuzzier to the outsider than the more obvious singer or front man role of a dancehall MC. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines 'MC' as an abbreviation of 'Master of Ceremony', which is defined as "1) a person who determines the forms to be observed on a public occasion; 2) a person who acts as host at a formal event; and 3) a person who acts as host for a program of entertainment (as on television)" (Merriam-Webster 2018). An MC in English electronic musical terms can be defined as a combination of the latter two definitions. In this context, the term can be traced back to Jamaican dancehall performances and even further back to sound system groups. In a sound system performance, the role of the MC would be to introduce DJs and other performers, songs and records to the crowd. This tradition can be linked to UK pirate radio stations which emerged in the surge of dance music and rave culture in the early 1990s, a movement in which MCs played an instrumental role in the promotion of the music both on stage at parties or raves, and on the (often pirate) radio. In addition to radio MCs providing introductions to artists

and transitions between songs, pirate radio broadcasts could include spoken performances on top of instrumental tracks. These performances would often consist of 8 or 16 bars, which in popular music terms are standard measurements for structural units in songs. Such rap performances could be organized as 'clashes', a term and concept that originates from Jamaican sound system competitions (Stolzoff 1998, A.Dot 2016) and that shares similarities with rap battles prominent in American hip hop culture, an example from popular culture being rapper Eminem's 2002 drama film *8 Mile*. The idea behind the sound clashes of Jamaican sound system, the rap battles of US hip hop and the clashes between UK garage/2-step/grime MCs is to eliminate, 'kill' or 'choke' their opponent(s) by use of displaying skill or performing verbal, and sometimes physical (Mason 2009), attacks on the opposing performer or group – to "kill them lyrically in the most inventive way possible" (Champion 2004).

Like US rap battles, the clashes that took place on UK pirate radio stations required listeners to have some knowledge about performers, topics and concepts that were present in the lyrics, and due to its rather local and London-specific thematic scope, grime MCs did not reach out to the masses in its humble beginnings in the early 2000s. Grime was a niche genre when it emerged, as were UK garage and jungle before briefly hitting the charts during their respective heights of popularity. The music was created and listened to by specific groups of people in specific parts of the country. The typical grime MC or fan would be living in predominantly working-class or lower middle-class urban areas in the northern or eastern outskirts of London, such as Tottenham, Bow and Hackney (Champion 2004). These areas all have high concentrations of immigrants from South Asia, the Caribbean and Western Africa, and a large part of grime's target group would be of working-class immigrant background. Grime has been used as an expression of identity, not only in the context of rival gangs or MC crews, or in terms of race or social class, but also representing *London* identity. Naturally, this has linguistic consequences and influences the language that is used within the genre.

Dating back to its emergence, grime has been described as something else than its American counterparts hip hop and rap. These differences are both thematic, stylistic and

linguistic, and display grime's links to dancehall, pirate radio and sound clash in the Jamaican sound system sense rather than funk, Afro-American soul and scat singing. Since its inception, grime MCs have attempted to describe the hardships of everyday life in a society filled with poverty, displacement and frustration. Early grime performances were, both stylistically and lyrically, attempting to manifest a lifestyle that was "fast-paced, agitated, and always moving", countering the newly emerged wealth and decadence of chart-topping garage MCs (De Lacey 2015). An example of grime's distance from its garage origins can be heard and read quite clearly in the first verse of Wiley's track *Wot Do U Call It?* from his 2004 album *Treddin' on Thin Ice* (1):

(1) Garage?
I don't care about garage
Listen to this - it don't sound like garage
Who told you that I make garage?
Wiley Kat'z got his own style but it's not garage
Make it in the studio but not in the garage
Here in London there's a sound called garage
But this is my sound, it sure ain't garage
I heard they don't like me in garage
Cause I use their scene but make my own sound
The Eskimo sound is mine recognise this it's mine
You can't claim what's mine
It's my time to beat you up
I don't hate you but some of you have got a problem
I'm putting you out of business why is that a problem
What's your problem?
What the heck my name is problem, remember?

(Wiley 2004)

Although early grime distanced itself from its musical origins, it remained faithful to its geographical origins. The success and critical acclaim of MCs such as Lethal Bizzle, Dizzie Rascal, Kano and the aforementioned Wiley led to a national expansion of the grime scene, and the genre gained popularity in other English cities during the mid-to-late 2000s. Birmingham, Blackpool and Manchester are among the cities that have housed blooming

grime scenes outside the capital (Hall 2014, Sawyer 2016, Boakye 2017). Despite grime's national spread, its appearances in international media were scarce. Although American acts featured on UK grime tracks and a number of grime acts enjoyed success on American hip hop charts, grime remained primarily a thing of the underground in an international framework. When describing grime in context with Multicultural London English as recently as 2014, Jonathon Green stated that grime was simply "too London" to ever break into international superstardom (Green 2014). The idea behind this statement appears to be that grime's London origins are too embedded in its lyrical and cultural expression in order for it to be exported to a worldwide audience and enjoy success on the scale of e.g. American hip hop stars such as Kanye West, Drake or Kendrick Lamar. Three years later, Green's statement has proven to be at best inaccurate. Tottenham-born grime MC and Boy Better Know founder member Skepta's fourth studio album *Konnichiwa* (2016) received worldwide critical acclaim, and the same year Canadian rap superstar Drake joined Boy Better Know's eponymous record label. Skepta also featured on the track *Skepta Interlude* on Drake's 2017 album *More Life* and *Put That on My Set* on New York rap supergroup A$AP Mob's 2016 album *Cozy Tapes Vol. 1: Friends*. Other UK grime acts to have made their mark on the international music scene are Peckham-born MC Giggs (featuring on Drake's "No Long Talk" on *More Life*) and Thorton Heath-born MC Stormzy has regularly featured as a guest artist during pop star Ed Sheeran's live performances of the latter's hit single "Shape of You". American music media have recently started paying grime some serious attention, the renowned *Rolling Stone* magazine among others (Hancox 2016, Clark 2017).

Despite the fact that some grime MCs are now starting to enjoy a certain degree of fame, the discourse surrounding grime music and grime MCs carries a strong tendency of levelheadedness, perseverance and staying true to the art, as can be heard in songs such as JME's "Same Thing" from his 2015 album *Integrity* (2):

(2) I've been there and I've done that
And I'm done with all this gun chat
I'm not mainstream, I'm underground
I've gone nowhere so I can't come back
Cause I stayed here, on my Js
Now you man can't look in my face
They've tried me, but I won't change
My music just to get paid
Fuck a label, fuck an A&R
Fuck radio
They don't care what I've gotta say so
They don't give a shit about how I make dough
Why everyone breads them, fam, I don't know
I only care about my supporters
They show love when they come to my show
So I make sure that I'm doing the same thing

(Jme 2015)

2.3.MLE in grime as an expression of a community of practice

As briefly mentioned earlier, the typical grime audience consists of young, black males with predominantly immigrant backgrounds, living in areas of London that have large Caribbean, West African and South Asian immigrant populations. This is reflected in the language that is used by grime MCs both in song lyrics and interviews. Grime language appears to stay true to the genre's musical origins and is representative of its users' and listeners' everyday speech patterns. Song lyrics and everyday speech seem to feed off one another, and as casual everyday speech adopts and adapts to certain linguistic features, the same features will quickly be implemented in the language used in song lyrics written and performed by the people who use these features. This dynamic can be linked to the concept of *communities of practice*, which relates to social networks and the two-way relationship between the language of individuals within a network and the collective linguistic information available in the network. Penelope Eckert, a key contributor to *communities of practice* as a field of study, defines a community of practice as "a collection of people who engage on an ongoing basis in some common endeavor: a bowling team, a book club, a friendship group, a crack

house, a nuclear family, a church congregation" (Eckert 2006). What constitutes the formation of a community of practice will in a number of instances appear unclear. Etienne Wenger (1998:125) compiles the following list of indicators pointing to the formation of a community of practice:

> 1. Sustained mutual relationship—harmonious or conflictual
> 2. Shared ways of engaging in doing things together
> 3. The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation
> 4. Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversation and interaction were merely the continuation of an ongoing process
> 5. Very quick set-up of a problem to be discussed
> 6. Substantial overlap in participants' description of who belongs
> 7. Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise
> 8. Mutually defining identities
> 9. The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products
> 10. Specific tools, representations and other artifacts
> 11. Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter
> 12. Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones

In a community of practice, language variation is co-constructed by the individuals in each respective community, and the linguistic information in the community is only truly available to the communities' members. For the most part, the collective negotiation of the use of certain linguistic features happens subconsciously both on an individual and a collective level. However, Eckert comments that

> [c]ertain aspects of linguistic style are also negotiated consciously. I can recall explicit discussion in my own high school crowd of "cool" ways to say things, generally in the form of imitations of cool people. … But in general, linguistic

> influence takes place without explicit comment and all the more requires direct access to speakers. The adoption of a way of speaking, like a way of dressing, no doubt requires both access and entitlement to adopt the style of a particular group. (Eckert 2000: 210-11 in Milroy and Gordon 2003: 118-19)

In the context of Multicultural London English, grime culture as a community of practice has emerged as an important source for linguistic variation. As previously mentioned, speakers of MLE cannot be identified solely based on ethnicity, economy, social class, gender or age (although the majority of speakers tend to be adolescents). Both 'MLE speakers' and 'contributors to – and followers of – grime culture' form distinctive communities of practice, and these groups can be identified more accurately by their belonging to each of these communities than for instance being identified as non-Anglo, below the age of 30 and coming from a low-to-middle-income family in a typically low-to-middle-income neighborhood in a London district with high Caribbean, West African and South Asian immigrant populations (Kerswill 2015). Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) state that a group of people for instance having an interest in a certain type of movies – or in this case a genre of music – does not constitute a community of practice. However, in the case of many MLE speakers and many members of London's young grime audience, they both fit the definitions and meet Wenger's 12 indicators of community formation as mentioned above. It is the shared enterprise or endeavor of being a youngster in London and taking part in the activities and cultures that are available and relevant that identify the members of these communities. For some MLE speakers it seems more important to identify linguistically with being a young person from London than with being for instance of Nigerian, Jamaican or Pakistani cultural backgrounds.

An important point that should be made about the grime community is its public nature. Grime lyrics are public and accessible to listeners outside the core of the community. A concept that also distinguishes lects like MLE from simply being speech communities is that the linguistic implications of the speakers' identification processes are clear-cut and are talked about among the members of the community. There are sets of community-negotiated rules when it comes to speaking MLE, and an MLE speaker or a group of MLE speakers

may be able to identify and discuss features and words that MLE speakers use. The same applies to whether certain individuals belong to the community or not, and thus whether the same people are entitled to use the sociolect as a marker of belonging to the community. An example of this can be seen and heard in a 2012 video showing a group of young Londoners representing various media (YouTube, blogs, music production) discussing whether grime MC Skepta, who is of Nigerian not Caribbean descent, is entitled to and justified in using the typically Jamaican Creole term "ah wah di bloodclaat" – meaning approximately "what the fuck", *bloodclaat* ('blood cloth', 'sanitary towel') being a Jamaican derogatory term and swear word – in his 2012 song "You Know Me" (AllTalkVideo 2012). The debate poses questions about whether use of Caribbean terms by non-Caribbean speakers constitutes cultural appropriation. A prominent argument presented against the idea of cultural appropriation in this instance is that Skepta, other non-Caribbean MCs and indeed many other working-class or middle-class Londoners are constantly surrounded by speakers using terms of non-Anglo origins, and it is stated that Skepta would most probably use and appropriate this term whether or not he happened to be a famous grime MC. In "You Know Me", Skepta simply speaks the way he or anyone residing in and frequenting certain inner-city London boroughs would speak on the street, regardless of national background. This argument is highly relevant to the idea of 'MLE speakers' and 'grime audience' as communities of practice for at least two reasons: 1) it shows that there are clear rules within MLE communities as to what terms can acceptably be used by whom, and that there is discourse about linguistic features in MLE, with grime as its catalyst, and 2) it highlights the fact that a significant number of English grime listeners reside in the very estates, shop in the same shops and feel the same feelings of frustration and displacement as the artists that write the songs that they share as their common endeavor. Barron states that grime songs "articulate urban worlds as they are seen through the eyes of those who live within these social environments", and furthermore that "they constitute qualitative 'documents of life'" (Barron 2013:532).

Situations in which speakers from non-Creole linguistic backgrounds use Creole features in their speech can be linked to the concept called *acts of identity*, "in which people

reveal both their personal identity and their search for social roles" (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985:14). In their research on such acts, Robert B. Le Page and Andrée Tabouret-Keller presented three hypotheses on the situation of Creole as a second language for young Londoners of Jamaican or other Afro-Caribbean backgrounds:

> (i) That each child has at least a passive competence, possibly a bilingual active competence, in the West Indian dialect of its parents which it draws upon when, in its 'teens, it wishes to join the Afro-Caribbean peer group; it has, in addition, full competence in the London English of its peer group.
>
> (ii) That each child has a passive competence in the teenage peer group 'Jamaican' but does not exercise this option until it becomes a teenager.
>
> (iii) That each child as it enters its 'teens takes part in a fresh creation of a linguistic system as part of an assertion of in-group identity, drawing on many available but fragmentary resources to do so. (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985:155)

It should be noted that Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's research and hypotheses date back to almost half a century ago. Nevertheless, the hypotheses still appear relevant to the linguistic situation in London today. For MLE speakers of Caribbean background with direct impact of Creole in the language spoken at home, it is highly likely that there is at least a passive competence present from childhood. More specifically relating to MLE as a multiethnolect, however, it is more interesting to my thesis how the above hypotheses appear relevant if the word 'child' is replaced by e.g. 'young speaker' or 'youth' and the peer group in hypothesis (ii) is changed from 'Jamaican' to 'young Londoner' or, perhaps in the majority of cases, 'young black Londoner'. By using Creole in their speech, young and primarily black Londoners may reveal their identity as young, British, often black, and residing in or aspiring to reside in London, while at the same time revealing their search for confirmation in terms of social roles such as 'urban', 'hip' and perhaps also 'black'.

Another concept of linguistic theory that appears to have relevance to the emergence of MLE and its use in grime as a cultural venue, is *enregisterment*. Asif Agha defines enregisterment as "processes through which a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable

within a language as a socially recognized register of forms" (2003:231), and more specifically "a series of social processes – processes of value production, maintenance and transformation – through which the scheme of cultural values has a social life, as it were, a processual and dynamic existence that depends on the activities of social persons, linked to each other through discursive interactions and institutions" (2003:232). Further, Agha argues that processes of enregisterment involve

> "a gradual sedimentation of habits of speech perception and production across particular social domains of persons. These processes unfold one communicative event at time, though certain features of them (such as the possibility of mass circulation of messages) have the consequence that some events within such processes set the initial conditions for very large-scale forms of response"
>
> (2003: 269).

More directly relevant to the vocabulary of MLE and, as a result, of grime music, it seems reasonable to assume that certain linguistic features over time have been sedimented into the speech patterns of young Londoners residing in and frequenting urban areas that house large numbers of immigrants from Jamaica and other Caribbean nations, among others. As a result of this, people seeking to express a notion of belonging to a particular social group will adopt them into their personal registers. The social group in question is one that – both internally (within the social group) and externally (outside the social group, and perhaps also to the general public) – are associated with these slowly emerging speech patterns. In terms of the momentum of sedimentation, grime, as other popular music genres, may fall into what Agha describes as "mass circulation of messages". In the case of a register that is exhibited in the lyrics of musicians that appear to have a fanbase that for the most part is easily socially identifiable within itself, it is likely that the sedimentation of certain linguistic habits occurs substantially quicker than in the case of e.g. Received Pronunciation (which is the topic of Agha's article).

Historically an outlet for several waves of estranged and frustrated youth, from punk and NWOBHM (New Wave of British Heavy Metal) to the acid house rave scene, music plays an instrumental role in inner-city youth culture. Trends in music can have considerable impact on fashion (clothing, haircuts, accessories, etc.), attitudes towards fellow members or institutions of society (i.e. the early punk slogan "No future" being taken from the Sex Pistols' 1976 song *God Save the Queen*; the UK acid house rave scene principles of PLUR – Peace, Love, Unity, Respect) and, more importantly in the context of this research thesis, language. Certain music trends are strongly linked to certain dialects, sociolects and slang repertoires, examples being Oi!, a subgenre of punk with clear ties to the Cockney dialect as an expression of unpretentious working-class values (Petridis 2010), and the language of American hip hop, which to a large extent is a product deriving from African American Vernacular English, both grammatically and in the sense that slang vocabulary is an instrumental factor in hip hop language (Alim 2009). In this context, grime's close relationship with Multicultural London English sheds light on the expression of youth values and emotions through language in music.

2.4.Planned vs. unplanned speech

When discussing song lyrics as an expression of linguistic information, it is important to note that song lyrics are units of *planned speech* (a similar term for the same phenomenon is *scripted/unscripted speech*; I will use *planned/unplanned* hereafter), excluding freestyling or impromptu performances which may be relatively unplanned or spontaneous. As in any other music genre, this is of course also the case with grime lyrics and MLE. Typical MLE features may have higher or lower frequencies between an artist's casual speech and the same artist's song lyrics, depending on context and topic. Questions about identity and solidarity markers come into play here, in that it is possible for any artist within any genre to use certain linguistic features in their lyrics in order to emphasize and perhaps sympathize with certain cultures or groups of people. Prestige is a key factor here, as types and levels of prestige will help determine and identify the audiences which artists and songwriters write

and perform songs for. Audiences that typically prefer speaking and hearing overtly prestigious varieties of English will most likely find themselves sympathizing more with lyrics written in standard forms than with lyrics written in a language with high frequencies of recent adolescent slang words. Likewise, a music listener who speaks non-standard English and is surrounded daily by other speakers who use non-standard but – in the listener's community or communities of practice – covertly prestigious varieties of English will probably sympathize more easily with lyrics written in non-standard forms similar to the ones he or she is used to speaking and hearing. This creates an opportunity for artists to consciously or unconsciously use linguistic features that are typical of the language varieties that the bulk of their audiences tend to sympathize with. In more specific terms related to the research question of this paper, in order to project an image of being 'cool', 'real' or 'from the street', a grime MC has the opportunity to more frequently use prominent MLE or Creole-inspired linguistic features in his lyrics than he would usually do in an everyday conversation or an interview. Based on Deborah Tannen's work, linguist Barbara Johnstone lists the following features (Table 2.1 below) as typical in terms of differences between (relatively) unplanned and (relatively) planned speech or "discourse".

Many of the features typical of unplanned discourse can be said to fit under the heading of 'non-standard English', and can certainly be traced also in grime lyrics as planned speech and in the unplanned discourse of grime artists being interviewed. However, this study will focus on very specific features of Creole/MLE and will for the most part leave out the features listed above. The list in Johnstone gives an overview of rather general features that distinguish between planned and unplanned discourse, and I consider it unnecessary to elaborate on the five specific Creole features and Johnstone's more general list of features. The possible links between the five selected Creole features and features in Johnstone's list appear to be rather vague. However, if I am to point out two possible links between Johnstone's list and the focus of my study, it would be 1) that the five Creole features that are being studied here may have been learned early in the informants' lives, and 2) that the contexts in which the five Creole features seem to appear in the informants' lyrics to some extent rely on immediate context.

Relatively unplanned discourse	**Relatively planned discourse**
dependence on morphological and syntactic features learned early in life	use of complex morphological and syntactic structures learned later in life
reliance on immediate context to express relationships between ideas	relationships between ideas made explicit in words, with formal cohesive devices, topic sentences
preference for deictic modifiers (*this* man)	preference for articles (*a man*, *the man*)
preponderance of repair mechanisms	scarcity of repair mechanisms
repetition of sounds, words, syntactic structures	less repetition and parallelism
avoidance of relative clauses	use of relative clauses
more use of present tense, especially in narrative	more use of other tenses
less use of passive	more use of passive
fewer nominalizations, participles	more nominalizations, participles
more appositives for modification	more attributive adjectives
more coordination	more subordination
less compact, more words	more compact, dense, "integrated" [reference to Chafe 1982]

(Johnstone 2002:213)

Table 2.1. Some features of planned and unplanned discourse

3. Focus and methodology

3.1.Jamaican English/British Creole linguistic features: the focus of this study

A thorough investigation of Jamaican English/British Creole features in Multicultural London English could potentially survey and discuss the use of a wide range of features included in all linguistic levels. As an example of the vast number of possible features to include here, I point to the *Comparative Creole Syntax* (Holm & Patrick 2007), which compares and discusses the distribution of 97 syntactic features in 18 Creole grammars. The occurrence of 73 out of these 97 features are either attested or found to be rare in Jamaican Patwa (Holm & Patrick 2007:127-52). How many of these syntactic features have been carried over to British Creole and further to MLE is unclear and will vary between speakers and groups of speakers. Nevertheless, these numbers show that the options regarding which features to focus on are numerous, particularly considering that the numbers only include syntactic features. It would be beyond the scope of this study to elaborate on a large number of linguistic features. Therefore, some important choices have had to be made. In order to try and create a somewhat rich and dynamic image of how grime artists display MLE speakers' usage of Jamaican/Creole features, I have tried to include both syntactic, lexical and morphological features in my research. Frequency has also been an instrumental factor. In order to make possible the collection of data that represents the attributes and usage of a feature, I have chosen to primarily pick features that appear to be relatively frequent in both planned and unplanned speech. This paper will thus focus and elaborate on the following features:

1. Post-nominal plural marker *-dem*
2. Copula constructions (zero copula / *a* copula)
3. *a* as an auxiliary marking future reference
4. Verb chaining
5. *wagwan* 'what's going on'

In the following, I briefly present each of the features and comment on their usage in Jamaican English and British Creole.

1. Post-nominal plural marker *-dem*

There are three main plural markers in Jamaican English: *-s*, *-Ø* (zero), and *-dem*. Plural suffix *-s* has "commonly [been] ascribed by creolists to decreolization or English interference" (Patrick 2007: 143), and zero inflection is the most common, at least following generic nouns. Patrick, Carranza and Kendall (1993) found that plural *-dem* occurs more frequently following nouns pointing towards humans than towards inanimate objects, which appears to be the case in both planned and unplanned speech produced by grime artists. Also, according to Patrick (2007), the plural marker post-nominal *-dem*, which "presumably derives from the [3rd person] pronoun *dem* 'they, them, their'" (143), only occurs in 3rd person nouns in Jamaican English. However, in MLE it appears to also occur in 1st person plural nouns. The term *mandem*/*man dem* ('man' + PLURAL) can often be read and heard in grime lyrics and casual MLE speech as describing both 'we the men' (1), 'they the men' (2) and, perhaps less frequently, 'you the men' (3):

(1) None of the *mandem* are gonna pardon you
Fuck what you think I ain't asking you
Oh, oh, oh my giddy giddy
See me come through with a *mandem* 25 strong

(Frisco – *Shutdown*)

(2) Once the ladies are there, see the *man dem* reach
They wanna leave there with a number

(Wiley feat. Skepta, Jme & Ms. D – *Can You Hear Me (Ayayaya)*)

(3) Hold tight all the *man dem* in the place right now that wanna just skank
Hold tight all the guys that think I got big overnight like Tom Hanks

(Jme – *Murking*)

The term ‘mandem’/‘man dem’ is far from new in inner-city London speech patterns (infamous street gang Tottenham Mandem was for instance formed in the early 1980s), and in recent years it has even been used by North American and European hip hop acts such as Toronto-born DillanPonders and Norwegian rapper Arif.

In neither Jamaican English nor British Creole is the *-dem* plural marker strictly limited to forms like ‘mandem’ or ‘gyaldem’ (= ‘the girls’). There are examples of other forms, such as in Wiley’s track *Back with a Banger:* “Backstage chillin' in the dance with my dargs dem”, where the *-dem* plural marker follows a word referring to a non-human being (*dargs* ‘dogs’). However, occurrences of forms of this type appear to be rare in grime lyrics, which shows that the tendencies in the findings of Patrick, Carranza and Kendall (1993) seem to have been transferred from JE/BC to MLE.

2. Copula constructions (zero copula / *a* copula)

There are at least two non-standard copula constructions that occur, however seemingly rarely, in MLE and grime lyrics, and they both share characteristics with Jamaican English copula constructions. The first of these two is the equative copula marker *a*, as in (1). According to Patrick (2007), “[e]quative *a* is tense-neutral” and may be preceded by past *ben* or *did*”. This tense neutrality appears to be present in grime lyrics and MLE, and *a* copulas may refer to present tense as in (4), future tense as in (5) and past tense with *been* [bɪn] as in (6). The second non-standard copula construction that will be featured here is copula deletion or zero copula as in (7). This form appears more often in the sample lyrics than the *a* copula. Copula deletion may appear before noun phrases, adjective phrases or locatives, all of which are present in both Jamaican English and British Creole (Kortmann & Lunkenheimer 2013). However, due to relatively infrequent occurrences in the data set,

this study does not differentiate between the three domains in which copula deletion occurs but gathers all occurrences under the same term.

(4) I ain't met anybody I wanna be with more than you
That's why when the sun goes down at night
Man [singular] *a* [is] calling you

(Skepta – *Text Me Back*)

(5) I've been patiently waiting last time
But now manna [man *a*] come through barging

(Shorty – *What's Going On?*)

(6) Man are like Frisco, where you been?
Out here
Manna [man *a*] been out here

(Frisco – *Out Here*)

(7) We don't listen to no politician
Everybody [*Ø*] on the same mission

(Skepta – *Shutdown*)

3. *a* as an auxiliary marking future reference

Jamaican English lacks the English auxiliaries *be*, *do* and *have*, and as a marker for a wide range of features (e.g. progressive tense, habitual aspect), the marker *a* is often used instead of standard English auxiliaries, as in (8):

(8) In a dance gyal a wine up your waistline
Everybody goin' mad to the bassline

(Wiley – *Speakerbox*)

4. Verb chaining

Also known as 'serial verbs' (Patrick 2007: 140), verb chaining refers to a chain or string of non-modal verbs without any coordinating or subordinating markers. Two-verb chains as in (9) are relatively frequent, whereas three-verb chains appear to occur more rarely in MLE than in Jamaican English, and perhaps not at all. The relatively large sample of lyrics provided no three-verb chains. According to Patrick (2007: 141-42), Jamaican English seemingly allows four or more verbs in a verb chain, but no four-verb chains were identified during my data collection.

(9) And when you're looking at my mandem
try know you're looking at more than a crew

(Skepta feat. Jammer, Shorty, Frisco, Jme & KJ – *2 + 2 x 2*)

5. *wagwan*

The Jamaican English term *wagwan* ('what is going on?') as in (10) – (12) seems to have been incorporated into MLE to such an extent that its frequency is high in both planned and unplanned speech, as with *mandem*. It will here be regarded as an equivalent of 'what's on', 'what's happening', 'what('s) up', 'what's good', and will therefore be quantified in contrast to these terms.

(10) Yeah, hear me on the radio, *wah gwan*?
See me on the TV, hi Mum!

(Skepta feat. Novelist – *Lyrics*)

(11) Fam, come like you're dying to get near man
I dunno *wagwan* for your intentions fam

(Jme – *Calm*)

(12) Hello, Mr. Cowie. Welcome to Zion
Yeah 'cause *wagwan*

(Wiley – *Welcome to Zion*)

3.2.Boy Better Know – The informants of this study[1]

Formed in 2006 by Tottenham-born brothers Skepta and Jme, Boy Better Know is a collective of grime MCs who release their music on the record label with the same name. At the time of writing, Boy Better Know consists of the following MCs, in addition to in-house producers and DJs:

Skepta, born in 1982 as Joseph Junior Adenuga, born and raised in Tottenham. He has released four studio albums between 2006 and 2017 and is one of grime's most prominent acts. Both of Skepta's parents are Nigerian immigrants to the UK.

[1] In addition to the six MCs listed here, Boy Better Know houses two artists who are not included in this study due to their linguistic backgrounds. This applies to the following artists:

Solo 45, an MC based in Bristol. Because of his residence and linguistic background not being rooted in London, he is left out of this study.

Drake, a Canadian rapper that signed with Boy Better Know in 2017 and, because of his nationality and linguistic background, is not relevant to this study.

Jme, born in 1985 as Jamie Adenuga, is Skepta's younger brother. He has released three studio albums and has worked as a record producer. Unlike most grime MCs, Jme has a university degree in 3D Digital Design (Highsnobiety 2016). As a result, he has been instrumental in shaping Boy Better Know's visual identity and marketing the collective and label as a brand.

Wiley, born in 1979 as Richard Kylea Cowie Jr., has been dubbed 'the godfather of grime' (Highsnobiety 2016) due to his contributions to the genre. For the 2018 New Year's awards, Wiley was awarded an MBE for his services in music (London Gazette 2017), becoming the first grime MC to receive the acknowledgement. He has released twelve studio albums since 2004. Wiley is of Trinidadian descent (Wiley 2011) and grew up in Bow, London.

Jammer, born in 1982 as Jahmek Power, has been an influential figure in the grime scene partly due to the annual grime clash competition *Lord of the Mics*, which he has been running since 2004. He has released three studio albums. Jammer is of Jamaican descent and grew up in Leytonstone.

Frisco, born in 1982 as Deshane Cornwall, has released three studio albums on Boy Better Know, and is of Jamaican descent, and grew up in Tottenham.

Shorty, born in 1987 as Aaron Lawrence, got his stage name due to his short stature. He has released one studio album on the Boy Better Know label. He is of Jamaican descent (personal correspondence) and resides in Tottenham.

3.3.Frameworks and challenges regarding data collection

As the research presented in this paper partly relies on quantitative analysis of quite specific types of speech data, certain precautions must be made in terms of data collection and methodology. The method used to gather and prepare data on the features identified above will consist of 1) counting each feature's occurrence in each artist's sample of speech data, 2) comparing the frequencies of marked or 'Creole-like' varieties of each feature (if any)

with the frequencies of unmarked or 'non-Creole' varieties of the same feature (if any) within each artist's sample of speech data, and 3) comparing the frequencies of 'Creole-like' features found in each artist's data sample. The three processes mentioned here all present different challenges in terms of accuracy and representativeness. Before presenting the results of my data collection, I will list a number of factors that could potentially emerge as obstacles, limitations or sources of error. The sum of the factors in this list helps shape the framework in which the data has been collected:

1. A challenge that may arise in the seemingly straightforward task of counting the occurrence of a language feature in the lyrics of a single song is structural repetition. Textual motifs, hooks and choruses tend to be repeated, as in the chorus of Wiley's '25 MCs' from his 2015 extended play *#8*[2] (13):

(13) 25 MCs backstage chilling
Mandem are drinking, mandem are billing
I knew this already but my scene's winning
Changed your whole culture? My team did it
25 MCs backstage chilling
Mandem are drinking, mandem are billing
I knew this already but my scene's winning
Changed your whole culture? My team did it

To avoid skewing the data due to repetitions like these, it seems reasonable to only count choruses and hooks once per song (Álvarez-Mosquera 2015). However, the above example presents another challenge of repetition as it involves internal repetition (each hook consists of a four-line phrase (eight bars) that is repeated to create a sixteen-bar hook). In instances such as this one, each repeated textual structure can be said to create a similar type of skewing as if one was to ignore external structural repetition. For the purpose of consistency,

[2] This release is not a studio album and will therefore not be counted in the data. The inclusion of this example is for illustration purposes only.

one could argue for only counting one chorus or hook per song and ignoring whether or not the hook is internally repetitive. In my data collection, however, I have chosen to split hooks such as the one in the above example so that for instance the four (two times two) occurrences of the word 'mandem' only count as two. Each chorus or hook is still only counted once per song.

2. The language used in grime lyrics heavily relies on urban youth slang, which is in constant change. Creole-like language features that were in fashion among grime MCs in 2005 are perhaps not used as frequently today, and are perhaps replaced by non-Creole features, and vice versa. New Creole-like features that are absent in grime lyrics from the earlier years of the 2000s may have risen in popularity during the last decade and become frequently used by younger speakers of MLE and in the lyrics of newer songs. Of course, this will not only be the case with planned speech as found in song lyrics, but also in the unplanned speech of interviews. An MC such as Wiley, who has been active (and highly popular) in the grime genre since its inception in the early 2000s and that since 2004 has released twelve[3] full-length studio albums as a solo artist (not including collaborative work with other artists), is prone to use a slightly different language in his latest release than in his first release. Similarly, an MC who has not been active in the genre for more than a few years will perhaps not show any significant change from his or her first to his or her last release. This tendency creates a possible issue of representativeness with regards to time. In the case of Boy Better Know as a collective, however, this does not pose that much of a serious problem as the member lineup has been quite stable since it was formed in 2005-6, and the artists in the collective have contributed to Boy Better Know releases dating back to at least 2010 (with the exception of Solo 45, who served five years in prison shortly after the formation of the collective) (Highsnobiety 2016).

[3] Only eleven are counted here, as his latest release, *Godfather II*, was released in April 2018, which at the time of writing is too recent to be included here.

3. Although lineup continuity and consistency in terms of releases dating back a certain number of years appear not to pose serious issues here, finding interviews dating back as far as the artists' earliest releases is a challenge. As grime was primarily a local and underground genre until around 2010, and only got its serious breakthrough internationally during the last few years, early interviews with Boy Better Know artists are rare, in addition to often being short and rather trivial. Later interviews tend to be more extensive in length, and also dig deeper thematically than the 'shout out'-infused artists' representations of the collective's formative years.

Another possible problem with regards to interviews is that some of the artists in the collective enjoy more media attention than others due to their considerably higher mainstream popularity. Skepta, being named as one of the most influential people in the UK due to his contributions to grime (Debrett's 2017), is perhaps the most famous act in the entire genre, and JME and Wiley are both household names in the genre. Jammer is perhaps more known as the host of the clash event *Lord of the Mics* than as an MC, and Frisco and Shorty have not (yet?) reached the same levels of mainstream fame as their bandmates. This makes it more difficult to find extensive interviews with the likes of the latter than with superstars such as Skepta, and the degree of representativeness is therefore on thinner ice with regards to the comparisons between the former artists' song lyrics and unplanned speech. The more extensive and varied the interviews of a given artist are, the smaller are the chances of data skewing due to for instance a heavy focus on a certain thematic context during one particular one-minute interview.

4. As mentioned under point 2, highly productive artists such as Wiley will give a researcher a vast volume of text to collect data from. It is then likely that the data collected from Wiley's song lyrics is more representative of the artist's (planned) speech than what can be said of for instance Shorty, from whom this study will include speech data gathered from his only solo album (2016). Achieving representativeness is thus considerably more difficult in the case of the latter than in the case of Wiley.

5. The artists in Boy Better Know are of various backgrounds, all of which can be associated with similar speech patterns. In cases where two varieties of English share similar features, it is an impossible task to identify whether or not the use of a certain feature in an MC's speech is of Jamaican origin via Creole and MLE or whether it is of for instance Nigerian Pidgin or Antiguan Creole origins. During the collection of data, this has not been taken into account, but features that are shared between possibly co-influential varieties of English will be elaborated on in more detail during the discussion of my results.

6. Written interviews pose a considerable challenge with regards to editing. It is likely that a statement from an interviewee is edited to some extent between the time when the interview takes place and the time when it is published in written form. Non-standard grammar or morphology may be 'corrected' according to different editorial guidelines, words may be inserted, removed or replaced, and whole segments of an oral interview may be paraphrased by the reporter prior to publishing. Written interviews that stay true to representing the interviewee's dialect or ethnolect seem to be very rare in the case of grime artists. Thus, this paper includes no written interviews, but relies solely on audio/video recordings of interviews.

4. Findings

The following section will include tables containing information about the tokens collected from two data sets: 1) occurrences of the five selected features found in the six MCs' song lyrics, and 2) occurrences of the same five features found in interviews with the six MCs. The columns in each table are marked as "Creole" and "Popular". The former includes only numbers of tokens that have been clearly identified as Creole, whereas the latter includes not only variants close to Standard English but also variants that may occur in African American Vernacular English, Cockney or other non-standard varieties of English that are not British Creole or Jamaican English. The only exception to this two-part split between "Creole" and "Popular" is in the case of copula constructions (feature number 2 out of 5). As this study distinguishes between both 1) zero copulas and 2) *a* copulas as "Creole", the table showing the tokens for this category also shows the percentages for each of these two variants. It should be noted that all percentage figures are rounded up or down to the nearest whole number. This is also the case in each column in the table showing data on copula constructions.[4]

[4] The percentages of zero copulas and *a* copulas (rounded up or down) are added together in the final column, and in a number of cases the total percentage figure (rounded up or down) does not match the sum of the percentage figures for zero copulas and *a* copulas. Of the total 124 tokens of copula constructions found on Skepta's 2007 album *Greatest Hits*, 1 is an *a* copula. This constitutes 0.81%, which is rounded up to 1%. The number of zero (*Ø*) copulas (2 out of 124) constitutes 1.61%, here rounded up to 2%. The total number of Creole copulas, however (3 out of 124), constitutes 2.42%, which must be rounded down to 2%. The total percentage figure (2%) does not match the sum of the two individual percentages (1% plus 2%). In these cases, the total percentage will be more closely rounded up or down than the percentages for the two individual copula variants. An example of this is shown here:

Year	**Title**	**'*a*' copula**	***Ø* copula**	**Popular copula**	**Total % '*a*' and *Ø* copula**
2007	Greatest Hits	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	121	2

4.1.Scripted speech

The following section will include tables showing the distribution of tokens of the five selected linguistic features in the song lyrics of the six MCs of Boy Better Know. The tables will be ordered by linguistic feature in the same order that they were presented in the section presenting the focus of this study.

4.1.1. Post-nominal plural marker *-dem*

Wiley

Year	**Title**	**Creole**	**Popular**	**% Creole**
2004	Treddin' on Thin Ice	2	1	67%
2006	Da 2nd Phaze	0	6	0%
2007	Playtime is over	2	8	20%
2008	Grime Wave	3	5	38%
2008	See Clear Now	1	0	100%
2009	Race Against Time	0	3	0%
2011	100% Publishing	0	2	0%
2012	Evolve or Be Extinct	3	1	75%
2013	The Ascent	4	6	40%
2014	Snakes & Ladders	2	2	50%
2017	Godfather	3	5	38%

Table 4.1. Post-nominal plural marker *-dem*, Wiley (scripted)

Skepta

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2007	Greatest Hits	4	5	44%
2009	Microphone Champion	5	6	45%
2011	Doin' it Again	1	2	33%
2016	Connichiwa	5	4	56%

Table 4.2. Post-nominal plural marker *-dem*, Skepta (scripted)

Jme

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2008	Famous?	3	3	50%
2010	Blam!	0	1	0%
2015	Integrity>	3	3	50%

Table 4.3. Post-nominal plural marker *-dem*, Jme (scripted)

Jammer

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2010	Jahmanji	4	3	57%
2013	Living the Dream	5	2	71%
2014	Top Producer	3	2	60%

Table 4.4. Post-nominal plural marker *-dem*, Jammer (scripted)

Frisco

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2010	Fully Grown	2	0	100%
2014	British Nights	2	1	67%
2016	System Killer	7	5	58%

Table 4.5. Post-nominal plural marker *-dem*, Frisco (scripted)

Shorty

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2016	Moesh Music	1	2	33%

Table 4.6. Post-nominal plural marker -dem, Shorty (scripted)

4.1.2. Copula constructions

Wiley

Year	Title	'*a*' copula	*Ø* copula	Popular copula	Total % '*a*' and *Ø* copula
2004	Treddin' on Thin Ice	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	134	0
2006	Da 2nd Phaze	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	165	0
2007	Playtime is over	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	53	0
2008	Grime Wave	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	74	0
2008	See Clear Now	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	76	0
2009	Race Against Time	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	97	2
2011	100% Publishing	2 (5%)	0 (0%)	86	5
2012	Evolve or Be Extinct	1 (1%)	4 (4%)	101	5
2013	The Ascent	0 (0%)	8 (6%)	137	6
2014	Snakes & Ladders	3 (2%)	7 (5%)	133	7
2017	Godfather	3 (2%)	1 (1%)	173	2

Table 4.7. Copula constructions, Wiley (scripted)

Skepta

Year	Title	‘*a*’ copula	*Ø* copula	Popular copula	Total % ‘*a*’ and *Ø* copula
2007	Greatest Hits	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	121	2
2009	Microphone Champion	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	55	2
2011	Doin’ it Again	0 (0%)	4 (6%)	59	6
2016	Konnichiwa	3 (3%)	9 (8%)	105	10

Table 4.8. Copula constructions, Skepta (scripted)

Jme

Year	Title	‘*a*’ copula	*Ø* copula	Popular copula	Total % ‘*a*’ and *Ø* copula
2008	Famous?	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	179	1
2010	Blam!	0 (0%)	3 (3%)	94	3
2015	Integrity>	0 (0%)	4 (3%)	136	3

Table 4.9. Copula constructions, Jme (scripted)

Frisco

Year	Title	‘*a*’ copula	*Ø* copula	Popular copula	Total % ‘*a*’ and *Ø* copula
2010	Fully Grown	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	93	2
2014	British Nights	1 (1%)	2 (3%)	75	4
2016	System Killer	2 (1%)	6 (3%)	180	4

Table 4.10. Copula constructions, Frisco (scripted)

Jammer

Year	Title	'*a*' copula	*Ø* copula	Popular copula	Total % '*a*' and *Ø* copula
2010	Jahmanji	2 (2%)	3 (3%)	113	4
2013	Living the Dream	4 (3%)	4 (3%)	130	6
2014	Top Producer	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	113	1

Table 4.11. Copula constructions, Jammer (scripted)

Shorty

Year	Title	'*a*' copula	*Ø* copula	Popular copula	Total % '*a*' and *Ø* copula
2016	Moesh Music	2 (2%)	3 (4%)	79	6

Table 4.12. Copula constructions, Shorty (scripted)

4.1.3. *a* as an auxiliary with future reference

Wiley

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2004	Treddin' on Thin Ice	1	18	5
2006	Da 2nd Phaze	1	35	3
2007	Playtime is over	1	23	4
2008	Grime Wave	0	22	0
2008	See Clear Now	0	18	0
2009	Race Against Time	4	20	20
2011	100% Publishing	0	21	0
2012	Evolve or Be Extinct	0	14	0
2013	The Ascent	2	14	13
2014	Snakes & Ladders	2	14	13
2017	Godfather	6	29	17

Table 4.13. *a* as an auxiliary with future reference, Wiley (scripted)

Skepta

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2007	Greatest Hits	2	20	9
2009	Microphone Champion	1	10	9
2011	Doin' it Again	3	11	21
2016	Connichiwa	8	11	42

Table 4.14. *a* as an auxiliary with future reference, Skepta (scripted)

Jme

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2008	Famous?	3	36	8
2010	Blam!	0	38	0
2015	Integrity>	3	40	7

Table 4.15. *a* as an auxiliary with future reference, Jme (scripted)

Frisco

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2010	Fully Grown	1	18	5
2014	British Nights	4	21	16
2016	System Killer	5	20	20

Table 4.16. *a* as an auxiliary with future reference, Frisco (scripted)

Jammer

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2010	Jahmanji	4	28	13
2013	Living the Dream	5	7	42
2014	Top Producer	0	24	0

Table 4.17. *a* as an auxiliary with future reference, Jammer (scripted)

Shorty

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2016	Moesh Music	2	10	17

Table 4.18. *a* as an auxiliary with future reference, Shorty (scripted)

4.1.4. Verb chaining

Wiley

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2004	Treddin' on Thin Ice	0	9	0
2006	Da 2nd Phaze	2	2	50
2007	Playtime is over	0	2	0
2008	Grime Wave	0	1	0
2008	See Clear Now	0	1	0
2009	Race Against Time	0	2	0
2011	100% Publishing	0	2	0
2012	Evolve or Be Extinct	1	4	20
2013	The Ascent	1	6	14
2014	Snakes & Ladders	0	1	0
2017	Godfather	0	0	0

Table 4.19. Verb chaining, Wiley (scripted)

Skepta

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2007	Greatest Hits	1	1	50
2009	Microphone Champion	1	0	100
2011	Doin' it Again	0	0	0
2016	Connichiwa	3	1	75

Table 4.20. Verb chaining, Skepta (scripted)

Jme

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2008	Famous?	0	3	0
2010	Blam!	4	2	33
2015	Integrity>	3	3	50

Table 4.21. Verb chaining, Jme (scripted)

Frisco

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2010	Fully Grown	0	0	0
2014	British Nights	3	2	40
2016	System Killer	5	0	100

Table 4.22. Verb chaining, Frisco (scripted)

Jammer

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2010	Jahmanji	1	1	50
2013	Living the Dream	3	0	100
2014	Top Producer	1	0	0

Table 4.23. Verb chaining, Jammer (scripted)

Shorty

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2016	Moesh Music	2	0	100

Table 4.24. Verb chaining, Shorty (scripted)

4.1.5. *wagwan*

Wiley

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2004	Treddin' on Thin Ice	0	0	0%
2006	Da 2nd Phaze	0	1	0%
2007	Playtime is over	0	1	0%
2008	Grime Wave	0	1	0%
2008	See Clear Now	0	0	0%
2009	Race Against Time	0	0	0%
2011	100% Publishing	0	0	0%
2012	Evolve or Be Extinct	1	0	100%
2013	The Ascent	1	0	100%
2014	Snakes & Ladders	0	0	0%
2017	Godfather	1	1	50%

Table 4.25. *wagwan*, Wiley (scripted)

Skepta

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2007	Greatest Hits	4	3	57%
2009	Microphone Champion	0	0	0%
2011	Doin' it Again	0	1	0%
2016	Connichiwa	3	1	75%

Table 4.26. *wagwan*, Skepta (scripted)

Jme

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2008	Famous?	1	0	100%
2010	Blam!	0	1	0%
2015	Integrity>	2	0	100%

Table 4.27. *wagwan*, Jme (scripted)

Frisco

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2010	Fully Grown	0	0	0%
2014	British Nights	1	0	100%
2016	System Killer	0	0	0%

Table 4.28. *wagwan*, Frisco (scripted)

Jammer

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2010	Jahmanji	0	0	0%
2013	Living the Dream	0	0	0%
2014	Top Producer	0	0	0%

Table 4.29. *wagwan*, Jammer (scripted)

Shorty

Year	Title	Creole	Popular	% Creole
2016	Moesh Music	1	1	50%

Table 4.30. *wagwan*, Shorty (scripted)

4.2.Unscripted speech

The following tables will show the distribution of 'Creole' and 'Popular' tokens of the five selected linguistic features found in interviews with the MCs of Boy Better Know. In contrast to the tables containing scripted speech data, the following tables will be ordered by MC instead of by linguistic feature. The reason for this is that some of the interviews include linguistic information that will be elaborated on in footnotes. An MC-by-MC presentation then looks cleaner and will be easier to follow than a feature-by-feature format. Each interview's domain (e.g. TV channel, radio station, etc.) and title is included for reference, and interview durations are given in the format minutes:seconds.

4.2.1. Wiley

Channel 4 News interview (2017)

YouTube title: *Wiley on fatherhood, politics, Dizzee feud, and underground creativity (extended interview 2017)*

Duration: 29:10

a as an auxiliary with future reference

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	18	0

Table 4.31. *a* as an auxiliary with future reference, Wiley (unscripted)

wagwan

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
2[5]	2	50

Table 4.32. *wagwan*, Wiley (unscripted)

-dem plurals

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	9	0

Table 4.33. *-dem* plurals, Wiley (unscripted)

Copula constructions

'*a*' copula	**Ø copula**	**Mainstream copula**	**Total % '*a*' and Ø copula**
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	82	0

Table 4.34. Copula constructions, Wiley (unscripted)

Verb chaining

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	21	0

Table 4.35. Verb chaining, Wiley (unscripted)

[5] During this interview, Wiley says "What's gwanin'?" twice (once describing what he would have said in a hypothetical situation where fellow grime artist Dizzie Rascal were present during the interview).

4.2.2. Skepta

HOT 97 interview, 2015

YouTube title: *Skepta on Real Late with Peter Rosenberg!*

Duration: 31:03

a as an auxiliary with future reference

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	21	0

Table 4.36. *a* as an auxiliary with future reference, Skepta (unscripted)

wagwan

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	2	0

Table 4.37. *wagwan*, Skepta (unscripted)

-dem plurals

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
2	10	17

Table 4.38. *-dem* plurals, Skepta (unscripted)

Copula constructions

'*a*' copula	**Ø copula**	**Mainstream copula**	**Total % '*a*' and Ø copula**
0 (0%)	1 (1%)	78	1

Table 4.39. Copula constructions, Skepta (unscripted)

Verb chaining

Creole	**Mainstream**	**% Creole**
0	18	0

Table 4.40. Verb chaining, Skepta (unscripted)

4.2.3. Jme

Link Up TV interview, 2016

YouTube title: *Jme has #BreakfastWithChuckie | Link Up TV*[6]

Duration: 47:03

a as an auxiliary with future reference

Creole	**Mainstream**	**% Creole**
0	21	0

Table 4.41. *a* as an auxiliary with future reference, Jme (unscripted)

[6] It should be noted that Jme's interviewer, a young, black Londoner who frequently interviews grime artists, uses more Creole than Jme does during the course of the interview.

wagwan

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	14	0

Table 4.42. *wagwan*, Jme (unscripted)

-dem plurals

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	6	0

Table 4.43. *-dem* plurals, Jme (unscripted)

Copula constructions

'*a*' copula	**Ø copula**	**Mainstream copula**	**Total % '*a*' and Ø copula**
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	134	0

Table 4.44. Copula constructions, Jme (unscripted)

Verb chaining

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	2	0

Table 4.45. Verb chaining, Jme (unscripted)

4.2.4. Jammer

Gigslutz TV interview, 2015

YouTube title: *Jammer: 10 Years of LOTM*[7] *[In-depth Interview]*[8]

Duration: 19:28

a as an auxiliary with future reference

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	6	0

Table 4.46. *a* as an auxiliary with future reference, Jammer (unscripted)

wagwan

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	0	0

Table 4.47. *wagwan*, Jammer (unscripted)

-dem plurals

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	12	0

Table 4.48. *-dem* plurals, Jammer (unscripted)

[7] *Lord of the Mics*, the clashing competition that Jammer created and still manages.
[8] There are no 'Creole' tokens in this interview, neither used by Jammer nor the interviewer.

Copula constructions

'*a*' copula	**Ø copula**	**Mainstream copula**	**Total % '*a*' and Ø copula**
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	91	0

Table 4.49. Copula constructions, Jammer (unscripted)

Verb chaining

Creole	**Mainstream**	**% Creole**
0	3	0

Table 4.50. Verb chaining, Jammer (unscripted)

4.2.5. Frisco

be83 interview, 2014

YouTube title**:** *Despa presents Meet The Artists [SE1.EP12] | be83*[9]

Duration: 32:07

a as an auxiliary with future reference

Creole	**Mainstream**	**% Creole**
0	32	0

Table 4.51. *a* as an auxiliary with future reference, Frisco (unscripted)

[9] be83's describes itself as following on its YouTube page: "be83 Network is your first destination for Music, Culture & Lifestyle programming centred around UK music & the urban experience." The interviewer, Despa Robinson, frequently interviews grime artists, and uses more Creole than Frisco during the course of the interview.

wagwan

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	0	0

Table 4.52. *wagwan*, Frisco (unscripted)

-dem plurals

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	12	0

Table 4.53. *-dem* plurals, Frisco (unscripted)

Copula constructions

'*a*' copula	**Ø copula**	**Mainstream copula**	**Total % '*a*' and Ø copula**
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	93	0

Table 4.54. Copula constructions, Frisco (unscripted)

Verb chaining

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	15	0

Table 4.55. Verb chaining, Frisco (unscripted)

4.2.6. Shorty

Interview #1

GRIMEREPORTTV interview, 2013

YouTube title: *Shorty BBK On New Music & Producing [Moesh Out Now]*

Duration: 3:29

a as an auxiliary with future reference

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	8	0

Table 4.56. *a* as an auxiliary with future reference, Shorty (unscripted, interview #1)

wagwan

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
1	0	100

Table 4.57. *wagwan*, Shorty (unscripted, interview #1)

-*dem* plurals

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	0	0

Table 4.58. -*dem* plurals, Shorty (unscripted, interview #1)

Copula constructions

'*a*' copula	**Ø copula**	**Mainstream copula**	**Total % '*a*' and Ø copula**
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	26	0

Table 4.59. Copula constructions, Shorty (unscripted, interview #1)

Verb chaining

Creole	**Mainstream**	**% Creole**
0	0	0

Table 4.60. Verb chaining, Shorty (unscripted, interview #1)

Interview #2

RepDatTV interview, 2012

YouTube title: *SHORTY BBK INTERVIEW #REPDAT #EskiDance #GRIME @ShortyBBK*

Duration: 1:34

a as an auxiliary with future reference

Creole	**Mainstream**	**% Creole**
0	0	0

Table 4.61. *a* as an auxiliary with future reference, Shorty (unscripted, interview #2)

wagwan

Creole	**Mainstream**	**% Creole**
0	0	0

Table 4.62. *wagwan*, Shorty (unscripted, interview #2)

-dem plurals

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
1[10]	0	100

Table 4.63. *-dem* plurals, Shorty (unscripted, interview #2)

Copula constructions

'*a*' copula	**Ø copula**	**Mainstream copula**	**Total % '*a*' and Ø copula**
0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6	0

Table 4.64. Copula constructions, Shorty (unscripted, interview #2)

Verb chaining

Creole	Mainstream	% Creole
0	0	0

Table 4.65. Verb chaining, Shorty (unscripted, interview #2)

[10] Shorty uses the term *my peopledem* in this interview.

5. Data analysis

The above data sets give information about 1) how and how widely Creole features are distributed both within and between each artist's scripted speech, 2) how and how widely Creole features are distributed both within and between each artist's unscripted speech, and 3) how the distributions of Creole features compare between each artist's speech patterns, both scripted and unscripted. The total sample of scripted speech data shows certain overall tendencies. One is that the frequencies of Creole features in all artists' song lyrics are relatively low compared to more mainstream or 'standard-like' features. Another is that the use of Creole features in grime lyrics tends to grow in popularity over time: while most artists' earlier works appear to be either devoid of or hardly influenced by Creole-like language, most of their later works carry significantly larger percentages of Creole features. As grime is a music genre that at least partly derives from Caribbean-influenced and at times Creole-driven music genres, a higher level of Creole-like language is perhaps to be expected in releases from the genre's formative years than in later years when the genre has been expanding to audiences outside London and the UK. This tendency is particularly interesting with regards to Wiley, one of grime's earliest contributors, who during his pre-2013 releases displays a lower degree of willingness to use the five specified Creole features than in his post-2013 releases. It could perhaps be expected that early Wiley recordings in particular would showcase a more 'raw' and 'real' language possibly showing traces of grime's musical ancestry. The case, however, appears to be quite the opposite: Wiley's early releases are infused by mainstream, and for the most part standard, English. This same tendency is perhaps even more evident in Skepta's song lyrics over time. The differences in the distributions of certain Creole features in his four full-length releases are substantial, and generally point towards what appears as a clear trend: that Creole-like language in grime lyrics has increased in popularity in parallel with the genre in itself having increased in popularity.

The interviews used for collecting unscripted speech data are of slightly variable nature, but they are for the most part on the same level of formality. It was a deliberate choice to aim for even levels of formality between all the artists' interviews. By using interviews of similar degrees of formality, I have attempted to eliminate as much as possible the potential influence of the interview setting and, as a possible consequence, the interviewer's speech patterns. Most of the interviews are produced for magazines, radio channels, YouTube channels or other venues that focus specifically on grime or music in general, and the interviews are for the most part conducted in casual settings. Wiley's interview with Channel 4 News is probably the most formal of the lot, and even this interview situation appears to be rather casual. For five out of the six artists, finding extensive interviews proved relatively easy. For the most part, artist interviews are easily accessible on the internet (YouTube, Vimeo, etc.). The only exception to this is Shorty, perhaps the least prominent of the six artists in the collective. I was only able to find two short interviews with Shorty, both for small, independent, grime-related online TV or radio channels. These interviews mostly consist of Shorty looking into the camera and speaking to the viewer of the video as opposed to speaking to the interviewer. This gives Shorty's interviews a more promotional effect, and his language is prone to be affected by this. It is possible that the self-promotion that is found in the context of the interviews causes Shorty to alter his language to become more street-like or 'cool'. This possible code switch involving using a more covertly prestigious language than what can be considered 'natural' to the speaker does not seem likely in the contexts of the other artists' interviews.

Although based on a relatively small sample of unscripted speech data, the results show at least three clear overall tendencies:

1) Low distributions of Creole features in all artists' unscripted speech patterns. The use of Creole in the interviews ranged between three occurrences for most frequent Creole user (Skepta) and zero occurrences for the least frequent Creole users (Jme, Jammer and Frisco).

2) Significantly lower distributions of Creole features in all artists' unscripted speech patterns compared to their scripted speech patterns. The most frequent Creole user in

unscripted speech (Skepta) uses just over 2% Creole, whereas three out of six artists uses no Creole at all during the interviews.

3) A relatively even distribution of Creole features between each artist's unscripted speech patterns.

5.1. Tendencies

1) Low distributions of Creole features in all artists' unscripted speech patterns

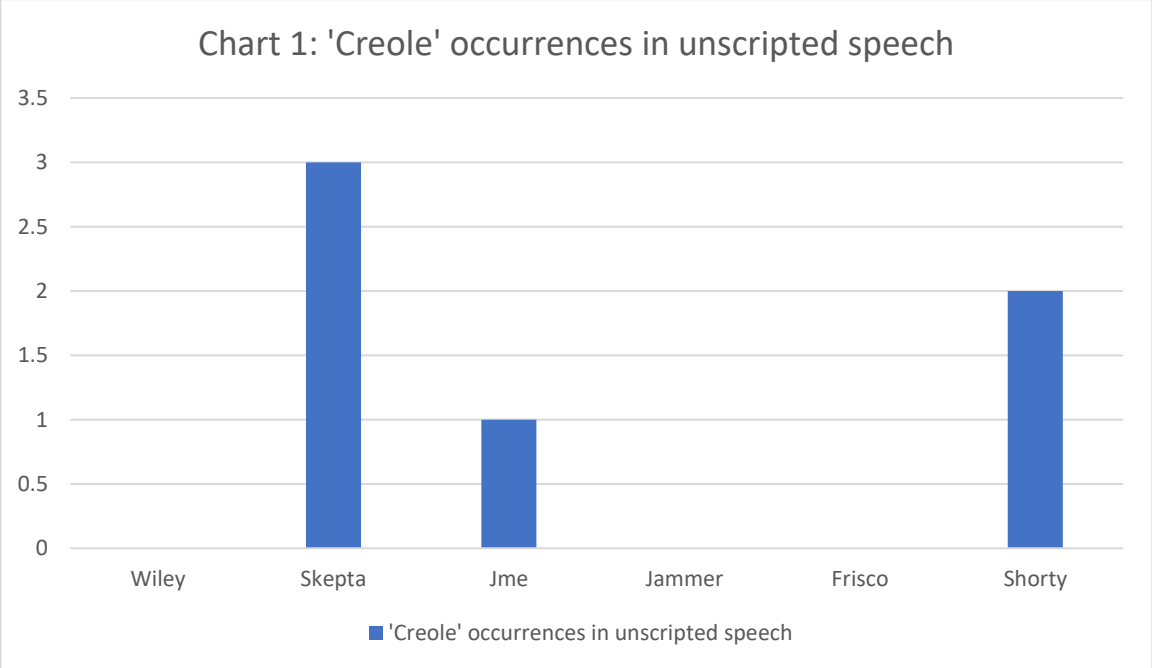
The five selected Creole-like features are either absent or rare in all artists' unscripted speech data. In a data set consisting of close to three hours of total interview time spread across all six artists, a mere total of six Creole-like tokens were found. This number is not only significantly smaller than the overall numbers of tokens produced by the same artists' song lyrics; the numbers for each feature appear too small for the given feature to be considered as present or prominent in each artist's speech, and perhaps also smaller than what could be expected for the average MLE speaker.

2) Significantly lower distributions of Creole features in all artists' unscripted speech patterns compared to their scripted speech patterns

Out of a total 3675 tokens collected from the scripted speech data, 260 of them (just above 7 per cent) were marked as 'Creole'. Out of a total 748 tokens of unscripted speech data, 7 of them (less than 1 per cent) were marked as 'Creole'. It should be noted that the number of occurrences of Creole features increased dramatically for most of the artists during the 2010s. All the interviews in the study of the artists' unscripted speech patterns were conducted during the period 2013-2017, a period in which the album releases containing the most occurrences of Creole features were released. This makes the difference in total 'Creole' token percentages between the artists' scripted and unscripted speech patterns even more dramatic.

3) A relatively even distribution of Creole features between each artist's unscripted speech patterns

Three out of six Boy Better Know members used Creole features in their unscripted speech patterns. As shown in Chart 1, the distribution of the total of seven 'Creole'-marked tokens found in the unscripted speech data is relatively evenly spread between the three of them: Skepta's interview produced three tokens, Wiley's produced two, and Shorty's two short interviews produced one token each. The latter might seem surprisingly high compared to the other numbers, especially as the total data set for this artist consists of about five minutes of total interview time. The relatively high number of tokens found in Shorty's two rather short interviews may be due to the code switch that might have taken place in the context of his interviews. This code-switching is not very likely to have taken place in relation to the remaining five artists' interviews, so the interviews with Shorty skew the data slightly in this case.



The following section includes closer analysis of the speech data concerning each artist's scripted and unscripted speech, followed by a more in-depth analysis of the

distribution in Creole occurrences regarding each of the five selected linguistic features. To illustrate the overall increasing use of Creole language in each artists' song lyrics, I have chosen to present tokens from albums released later than 2013, as this year marks a significant change in the overall use of Creole in all six artists' lyrics.

5.1.1. Wiley

Wiley's catalogue of album releases best illustrates the overall tendency that Creole features appear to have increased in popularity in grime lyrics over time. Apart from two instances of verb chaining in his second release and continuous use of the '-dem' plural marker from the early days of his career, occurrences of the five selected Creole features are rare in Wiley's pre-2010 releases. During the 2010s, occurrences seem to become implemented in Wiley's song lyrics with increasing degree. Overall, Wiley uses the Creole variants of the selected features with a lower frequency (percentage-wise) than all other artists in the collective. Wiley's lyrics account for almost half of the total number of tokens from the data set of scripted speech (1526 tokens), and only 55 out of these 1526 (less than 4%) are marked as 'Creole'. It should be noted that around half (28 out of 55) of the total 'Creole' tokens are found in lyrics from Wiley's last three albums[11], all released when Wiley was well into his 30s. The notion that MLE is spoken primarily by young Londoners, combined with the fact that Wiley displays a lower degree of preference for the Creole variants of the five selected linguistic features, suggests that the relatively late entry of Creole language in Wiley's lyrics may be result of a certain degree of code-switching or, perhaps more likely, enregisterment. As processes of enregisterment can happen over a relatively short time (Beal 2009), which seems to have been the case with MLE, it is likely that speakers that previously have been unaffected by the ongoing changes in register within the social network can have their speech patterns affected at a later stage. This may have been the case with Wiley's song lyrics.

[11] As of late 2017. *Godfather II*, released in April 2018 is due to its (at the time of writing) all too recent release date is not included here.

Wiley may have been influenced by the speech patterns of younger speakers within the community of interest that is the grime music scene (e.g. other MCs), and thus come to use more Creole over time as these features have been sedimented in the group's register.

The rising popularity of MLE among young Londoners and Englishmen in general might have initiated a wish to identify with recent language trends, even though Wiley's music and style of MC-ing/rapping was well established when he started using Creole language features more extensively. Another possible explanation for Wiley's relatively sudden but not dramatic tendency to use more Creole-like language in his lyrics post-2010 is that it was at this time that grime as a music genre started reaching new heights of popularity, at least within the UK. Using an increasing amount of Creole language in his song lyrics may have been an elaborate choice made in order to make a large audience of listeners identify the music with London and the grime scene, as opposed to previously exposing the music to an audience which was familiar with the grime scene at an underground level. For the most part, the latter audience can be expected to already identify with the identity markers that Creole language may have represented. Of course, this tendency might also be attributed to a natural influence that the increasing frequency and perhaps increasing creolization of MLE in London might have had on Wiley.

5.1.2. Skepta

The collected volume of lyrics from Skepta's four studio albums is another clear indication of increasing preference for Creole language over time, and Skepta's lyrics show the most dramatic increase in occurrences. Out of a total 477 tokens across four albums, 61 are marked as 'Creole'. This makes 13%, the highest percentage of any of the six artists portrayed here. Approximately half of the total number of 'Creole'-marked tokens (31 out of 61) are found in lyrics from Skepta's 2016 album *Konnichiwa,* his last one to date. This is by far the most dramatic increase in frequencies of Creole occurrences found among the six artists' lyrics and confirms the tendency which was hinted in Wiley's lyrics; that Creole language features appear to become increasingly popular over time, and that this increasing popularity is

parallel to the increasing popularity of grime music. It should be noted that Skepta is the most acclaimed artist of the six worldwide, and that most of the features on *Konnichiwa* are American. The dramatic increase in the occurrence of certain features, zero copula constructions and *a* future tense markers in particular, may be connected to an increasing exposure to and possible influence from linguistic tendencies in American hip hop, where both zero copulas and *a* future markers are common. As these two features are by far the ones for which Skepta's lyrics display the most dramatic increases in frequency, it is likely if not certain that influences from outside developments in MLE and grime can be attributed to these increases. Apart from zero copulas and *a* future markers, the changes in Skepta's lyrics are quite slow. With the exception of his 2011 release *Doin' it Again*, which appears to be relatively rich in more standard or mainstream variants, Skepta's use of Creole variants of the five selected linguistic features seems to be relatively stable prior to *Konnichiwa* (2016) and its rather drastic shift. Lastly, it should be noted that Skepta, the artist with the highest frequencies of Creole features, is of Nigerian descent. Neither zero copula nor *a* as an auxiliary with future reference are frequent in Nigerian English, although they are frequent in Nigerian Pidgin. It is unclear to the author whether Skepta and Jme's parents speak and spoke a basilectal pidgin variety or a more acrolectal variety (closer to Standard Nigerian English) at home.

5.1.3. Jme

A total of 569 tokens were found in the lyrics from Jme's three studio albums. Out of these 569 tokens, 30 were marked as 'Creole'. This constitutes just above 5%, which is only slightly more than the equivalent figure for Wiley, while it is a significant drop compared to the figures representing the scripted speech of his older brother Skepta (13%). The occurrences of 'Creole'-marked tokens are quite evenly spread between Jme's three albums, and while the frequencies of zero copulas in his lyrics have increased steadily over time, other features like *-dem* plural markers and *a* as an auxiliary expressing future occur only in lyrics from his first and (to date) last albums. What is perhaps most noticeable in Jme's case

is the comparison with Skepta. Sharing biological parents and having ventured together in the grime scene since the mid-2000s, they could be expected to display somewhat similar tendencies in terms of language and linguistic choices. If the relatively high frequencies of Creole language in Skepta's lyrics are at least partly due to Nigerian Pidgin influences, these factors should also be traceable in Jme's speech patterns, in unscripted speech if not in scripted. The data sets seem to show no such correlation, neither in the song lyrics nor the interviews. It is therefore likely that Skepta's relatively frequent use of Creole linguistic features on his most recent release follows the suggested influence from interaction with American hip hop culture. Jme is less exposed to worldwide fame than his older brother, whilst still being a household name in grime in the UK. As his lyrics even so show a steady increase in occurrences of Creole language, Jme fits the previously suggested link between the increasing popularity of his music and wanting to identify himself and the music with London and MLE (as is possible in the case of Wiley).

5.1.4. Jammer

Out of 463 total tokens found in the lyrics from Jammer's three studio albums, 40 were marked as 'Creole'. This makes for just under 9%, which is significantly higher than the equivalent numbers for both Wiley and Jme, whilst still lower than the figures for Skepta's lyrics. It should be noted that Jammer's 2014 release *Top Producer* consists of songs recorded between 2004 and 2006 (The Grime Report 2014). With this taken into account, the lyrics from Jammer's studio albums set in chronological order display a steady increase in use of Creole language. The feature that is the most prominent in Jammer's data set is verb chaining, which occurs as 'Creole' in 83% of all tokens. Interestingly, this variant does not occur once in Jammer's unscripted speech patterns for the duration of a half-hour interview. It should also be noted that no form of *wagwan* occurs in Jammer's song lyrics. This is rather unexpected as out of the six artists forming the 'London branch' of Boy Better Know, Jammer is one out of only two MCs of Jamaican descent. At the same time, it shows a relatively clear correlation between Jammer's scripted and unscripted speech patterns in

that he uses a significantly higher number of Creole variants in his song lyrics than in the unscripted speech patterns sampled from his interview. Whether or not it is a conscious choice for Jammer to display a more Jamaican or Caribbean identity in his song lyrics is unclear, but he shows this tendency to a larger degree than for instance Wiley, who is of Trinidadian descent.

5.1.5. Frisco

Frisco, also being of Jamaican descent, displays approximately the same percentage of 'Creole'-marked token occurrences as Jammer. Out of a total 458 tokens, 43 were marked as 'Creole'. This makes just over 9%, the same as Jammer, significantly more than Wiley and Jme, but still significantly less than Skepta. Frisco's three studio albums display a steady and consistent increase in Creole variant occurrences, and this further strengthens the idea that using Creole language in grime lyrics has become increasingly popular since the genre's early years. At the same time, Frisco's interview produced no 'Creole'-marked tokens. Like Jammer, and indeed all members of Boy Better Know, Frisco uses a dramatically higher percentage of Creole language in scripted speech than in his unscripted speech patterns.

5.1.6. Shorty

Out of the six London-raised artists in Boy Better Know, Shorty has released the smallest amount of music. His only album *Moesh Music* (2016) produced a total of 103 tokens, 11 of which were marked as 'Creole'. This constitutes 11% of all tokens, and places Shorty as the grime collective's second most frequent user of the five selected Creole linguistic features. Showing relatively high Creole frequency percentages for all five features, he is also the most consistent Creole user of the six artists. Due to the overall low volume of both scripted and unscripted speech data, however, it is hard to determine the significance of the

tendencies displayed in Shorty's data sets. At the same time, Shorty uses no more than one *-dem* plural marker and one *wagwan* during the course of his two short interviews, while Creole variants of the remaining three features are absent. Therefore, although the data sets are rather small in Shorty's case, the tendencies confirm the pattern which has taken shape during the analysis of the other five members' data sets. Shorty, as the rest of Boy Better Know, seems to use Creole in his unscripted speech to a much lesser degree than in his scripted speech.

Here follows an artist-by-artist overview of tokens collected for each linguistic feature. The tables are split between total tokens (left) and tokens from albums released in or later than 2013 (right).

-dem plural marker

MC	**Total**	**Post-2013**
Wiley	20 out of 59, 34%	9 out of 22, 41%
Skepta	15 out of 32, 47%	5 out of 9, 56%
Jme	6 out of 13, 46%	3 out of 6, 50%
Jammer	12 out of 19, 63%	5 out of 7, 71%
Frisco	11 out of 17, 65%	9 out of 15, 60%
Shorty	1 out of 3, 33%	1 out of 3, 33%

Table 5.1. Use of *-dem* plural markers in total and post-2013 (scripted)

wagwan

MC	**Total**	**Post-2013**
Wiley	3 out of 7, 43%	2 out of 3, 67%
Skepta	7 out of 12, 58%	3 out of 4, 75%
Jme	3 out of 4, 75%	2 out of 2, 100%
Jammer	0 out of 0, N/A	0 out of 0, N/A
Frisco	1 out of 1, 100%	1 out of 1, 100%
Shorty	1 out of 2, 50%	1 out of 2, 50%

Table 5.2. Use of *wagwan* in total and post-2013 (scripted)

Verb chaining

MC	Total	Post-2013
Wiley	4 out of 34, 12%	1 out of 8, 13%
Skepta	5 out of 7, 71%	3 out of 4, 75%
Jme	7 out of 15, 47%	3 out of 6, 50%
Jammer	5 out of 6, 83%	3 out of 3, 100%
Frisco	8 out of 10, 80%	8 out of 10, 80%
Shorty	2 out of 2, 100%	2 out of 2, 100%

Table 5.3. Use of verb chaining in total and post-2013 (scripted)

a as an auxiliary with future reference

MC	Total	Post-2013
Wiley	17 out of 245, 7%	10 out of 67, 14%
Skepta	14 out of 66, 21%	8 out of 19, 42%
Jme	6 out of 120, 5%	3 out of 43, 7%
Jammer	9 out of 68, 13%	5 out of 12, 42%
Frisco	10 out of 69, 14%	9 out of 50, 18%
Shorty	2 out of 12, 17%	2 out of 12, 17%

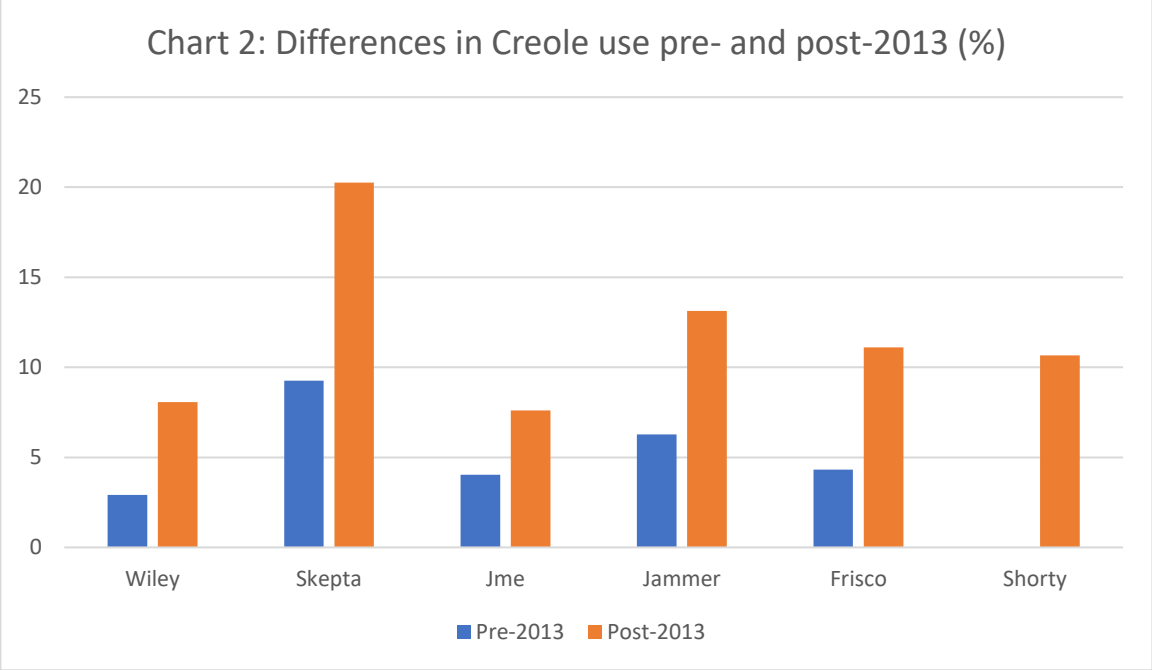
Table 5.4. Use of *a* as an auxiliary with future reference in total and post-2013 (scripted)

a or *Ø* copula constructions

MC	Total	Post-2013
Wiley	11 out of 1260, 1% (*a*); 20 out of 1260, 2% (*Ø*)	6 out of 445, 1% (*a*); 16 out of 445, 4% (*Ø*)
Skepta	4 out of 360, 1% (*a*); 16 out of 360, 4% (*Ø*)	3 out of 117, 3% (*a*); 9 out of 117, 8% (*Ø*)
Jme	0 out of 417, 0% (*a*); 8 out of 417, 2% (*Ø*)	0 out of 140, 0% (*a*); 4 out of 140, 3% (*Ø*)
Jammer	6 out of 370, 2% (*a*), 8 out of 370, 2% (*Ø*)	4 out of 138, 3% (*a*), 4 out of 138, 3% (*Ø*)
Frisco	4 out of 361, 1% (*a*), 9 out of 361, 2% (*Ø*)	3 out of 266, 1% (*a*), 8 out of 266, 3% (*Ø*)
Shorty	2 out of 84, 2% (*a*), 3 out of 84, 4% (*Ø*)	2 out of 84, 2% (*a*), 3 out of 84, 4% (*Ø*)

Table 5.5. Use *a* or *Ø* copula constructions in total and post-2013 (scripted)

These numbers and tables show an overall rise in use of Creole post-2013. Out of a total 1500 tokens collected from the informants' lyrics post-2013, 160 were marked as 'Creole'. This amounts to just below 11%, whereas the total percentage of 'Creole'-marked tokens, all albums included, amounted to just above 7% (260 out of 3675 tokens). This means that the 100 'Creole'-marked tokens from albums prior to 2013 make up less than 5% of the remaining 2175 tokens. This tendency is pictured in Chart 2 below. Considering the relatively low frequencies of Creole feature occurrences overall, this constitutes quite a dramatic shift in the popularity of Creole, how at least five out of six artists steadily increased the amount of Creole language in their song lyrics. Shorty released his only album in 2016, so the tokens collected from his work cannot be attributed a lot of weight when describing this tendency. It should also be noted here that Jammer's 2014 release *Top Producer* consists of songs recorded between the years 2004 and 2006. This means that the lyrics from this album are included in the pre-2013 figures (above), despite its official release year.



The following section includes further analysis of the scripted speech data based on the ethnic backgrounds of the members of Boy Better Know. The totals for each individual

artist's scripted speech data are displayed here, in descending order in terms of frequencies of 'Creole'-marked tokens:

MC	% 'Creole'
Skepta (Nigerian)	13% 'Creole'
Shorty (Jamaican)	11% 'Creole'
Frisco (Jamaican)	9% 'Creole'
Jammer (Jamaican)	9% 'Creole'
Jme (Nigerian)	5% 'Creole'
Wiley (Trinidadian)	4% 'Creole'

Table 5.6. Overview of MCs' nationalities and 'Creole' frequencies

Considering the overall low frequencies of 'Creole'-marked tokens (7% in total), the analysis of scripted speech data shows that there is a considerable gap between the most and least prominent users of Creole features. When this relatively low overall distribution is taken into account, the span between Skepta's total 13% 'Creole'-marked tokens and Wiley's total 4% must be regarded as considerable (it is also statistically significant ($p < .01$)). These spans and differences between the artist's frequencies of Creole use, combined with knowledge of each artist's ethnic background, point towards a tendency that sheds light on my main thesis question.

Perhaps the most striking piece of information found in the table above is that the most prominent user of Creole in his lyrics is Skepta, who is of Nigerian descent. Both of Skepta's parents were born in Nigeria, but it is not clear where their speech patterns would belong on the post-creole continuum. As mentioned earlier, speakers of acrolectal or 'standardized' Nigerian English do not make use of the five selected Jamaican Creole features, whereas speakers of basilectal Nigerian Pidgin tend to use them. A brief interview with Skepta's mother following his 2016 Mercury Prize win shows her speaking a variety close to Standard English, but this relatively small sample does not tell enough about her speech to point to any clear conclusions regarding the language spoken in the Adenuga home

during Skepta's upbringing. However, the fact that Skepta, as one of two non-Caribbean English MCs in Boy Better Know, uses Jamaican Creole language features the most is likely to be attributed to factors that have little or no connection with his parents' nationality. These factors will be elaborated on in more detail in the discussion section of this thesis.

What stands out as the most remarkable difference in 'Creole' occurrences in terms of Boy Better Know MCs' ethnic backgrounds, is the difference between Skepta and his younger brother Jme. Sharing biological parents, childhood homes and social circles, it is reasonable to expect that their linguistic inputs during adolescent years have been similar. The fact that Jme in total uses less than 5% Creole in his scripted speech versus his brother's 13% stands out as an incongruence and cannot be regarded as a mere coincidence. The token counts reveal that Skepta scores significantly higher in 'Creole'-marked tokens for all features except *wagwan* where Jme scores higher (75% vs 58%), and *-dem* plural markers where the difference between the two brothers is less than 1%.

5.2. Other factors

In an attempt to identify tendencies and variation in the data set of this study, I have tried to analyze the data in the context of factors that go beyond nationality and ethnic background. These factors include 1) age, 2) birthplace and residence during formative years, and 3) popularity measured in social media followers and number of plays according to the music streaming service Spotify. These factors are included in the analysis of the speech data not only for enrichment purposes but to serve as possible explanations for the variable tendency found in the data sets. The artists' ethnic backgrounds may partly explain the variations in use of Creole language, but the above table displaying the artists' ethnic backgrounds provides inconclusive information as to whether or not this factor is decisive in each artist's linguistic choices.

5.2.1. Age

To illustrate the impact of age on each artist's scripted speech patterns, here follows an overview of the artists' birthdates with their respective percentage of 'Creole'-marked tokens. I have listed the artists in ascending order from the youngest (Shorty) to the oldest (Wiley):

MC	**Birthdate/age**	**% 'Creole' tokens**
Shorty	born 17 April 1987, age 31 at the date of publication	11%
Jme	born 4 May 1985, age 33 at the date of publication	5%
Frisco	born 30 December 1982, age 35 at the date of publication	9%
Skepta	born 19 September 1982, age 35 at the date of publication	13%
Jammer	born 3 June 1982, age 35 at the date of publication	9%
Wiley	born 19 January 1979, age 39 at the date of publication	4%

Table 5.7. Overview of MCs' birthdates/ages and 'Creole' frequencies

As previously stated, Multicultural London English tends to be spoken primarily by young speakers. It then follows that the Jamaican Creole elements of the sociolect are more likely to be adopted by young speakers than by old speakers. The fact that Jme, the younger of the Adenuga brothers, tends to use less Creole language in his lyrics also contradicts the natural assumption that younger artists are prone to adopt and use Creole to a higher degree than older artists. In terms of age, Skepta and Jme are the only two MCs who break up an otherwise clear pattern, namely that the amount of Creole linguistic features found in each artist's lyrics is inversely proportional to the artist's age. It should be noted that the

differences in age between the artists are relatively small, in that the span between the oldest and the youngest artist is only eight years and three months. At the same time, there is a possible (however inconclusive) pattern emerging among the six MCs: The youngest artist, Shorty, uses Creole language in his lyrics almost three times more frequently than the oldest artist, Wiley. On the other hand, Shorty uses Creole less than Skepta, who is in the middle age-wise. While creating an at best fuzzy pattern based on age alone, the figures make an interesting point on ethnicity and nationality. Skepta and Jme are the only two MCs in the collective that do not have Caribbean backgrounds. They are also the only ones who diverge from the age pattern that the remaining artists form. This suggests that the age pattern is in fact valid for grime artists and other MLE speakers of Caribbean descent. Although the number of speakers (MCs) in this data set is probably too small to outline any general tendencies among other MLE speakers or indeed other grime artists, the age pattern among Boy Better Know's four MCs with Caribbean roots to some degree conforms with the hypothesis of younger speakers being more prone to adopt Creole language features. However, the pattern appears inconclusive all in all, and neither confirms nor disproves the hypothesis.

5.2.2. Origin/residence

Although the members of Boy Better Know may at times work closely as artists, far from all of the MCs grew up in the same social circles or indeed the same areas in London. This may have impacted each artist's language input during their formative years, as the different urban areas in and around London are far from heterogeneous in terms of demography. The linguistic landscapes may be similar between certain districts, but this can hardly be the case everywhere in London. It is for instance likely that growing up in a traditionally Cockney-speaking district on London's East End would have influenced the emergence of Creole speech patterns during adolescence on a different scale than growing up further west or north within Greater London. In order to investigate whether the geography of each artist's

upbringing has impacted the frequency of Creole in their scripted speech patterns, here follows an overview of the origins or residences of Boy Better Know's MCs:

MC	Origin/residence (London area)	% "Creole" tokens
Skepta	Tottenham	13%
Jme	Tottenham	5%
Wiley	Bow	4%
Jammer	Leytonstone	9%
Frisco	Tottenham	9%
Shorty	Tottenham	11%

Table 5.8. Overview of MCs' origins/residences and 'Creole' frequencies

The table shows that the distribution of Boy Better Know's artists is split between Tottenham on one side and northern areas of London's East End on the other. On average, the four Tottenham-born MCs' lyrics produce just below 10% 'Creole'-marked tokens, whereas East End-born Wiley and Jammer's lyrics produce just below 5% 'Creole'-marked tokens. However, the variation between the Tottenham-born MCs, between brothers Skepta and Jme in particular, is too significant for this to be a decisive factor. In addition to this, the numbers (two versus four artists) are simply too low to make any solid claims about whether or not the relatively limited geographic spread between the artists has played a significant part in the formation of their speech patterns.

5.2.3. Popularity

In an attempt to try out the hypothesis of popularity playing a part in artists' linguistic choices based on factors of listener identity, as discussed in the background section, I here present some key popularity figures for each artist. I have included the two most important social media outlets that all six artists make use of (save for Jme's lack of a public Instagram account), in addition to numbers of followers taken from music streaming service Spotify. Unfortunately, efficient and reliable methods for measuring 'popularity' in this context are

few to none, but as social media appear to be a key arena for contact between grime artists and fans, 'follower' figures emerge as a relatively fruitful source of information about commercial popularity. In the age of online music streaming services, record sales may also appear rather arbitrary. Unfortunately, finding the total number of 'plays' for an artist on Spotify is not an option. Therefore, follower figures are used here to create an image of the nuances in audience size for each artist. All of these figures exclude some possibly important factors such as audience or follower demography and attitudes, which are not possible to obtain here given the scope of this study.

MC	**Twitter followers**	**Instagram followers**	**Spotify followers**	**% "Creole" tokens**
Skepta	≈1.1 million	≈1.2 million	≈370 thousand	13%
Jme	≈940 thousand	N/A	≈200 thousand	5%
Wiley	≈480 thousand	≈230 thousand	≈190 thousand	4%
Jammer	≈120 thousand	≈100 thousand	≈10 thousand	9%
Frisco	≈110 thousand	≈70 thousand	≈20 thousand	9%
Shorty	≈70 thousand	≈40 thousand	≈200	11%

Table 5.9. Overview of MCs' social media/streaming followers and 'Creole' frequencies

As previously mentioned, the hypothesis of artists' commercial success and popularity having an influence on their choices and attitudes with regards to Creole language seems at first glance to be a reasonable assumption in at least Wiley's case. Wiley's increasing level of international recognition is close to parallel with his increasing use of Creole in his lyrics. At the same time, the hypothesis appears to be on much thinner ice when looking at the figures for brothers Skepta and Jme. The latter's relatively high popularity figures do not correlate with his relatively low frequencies of Creole use. For the three least known artists (Jammer, Frisco and Shorty), it is also hard to identify a clear-cut pattern. The data for Shorty's lyrics clearly contradicts the hypothesis of popularity, as Shorty is the least followed of the six artists, while at the same time being the second most frequent Creole user.

The patterns that become visible upon analysis of the data in this study suggest that linguistic choices made by grime artists are highly individual. Song lyrics showcase a high degree of linguistic variation within each individual artist's speech patterns, and, as a natural consequence, a high degree of variation between each MC. In some cases, it is difficult to discern a clear tendency either within a single artist's catalogue of lyrics or between two or more artists' catalogues. An example of this is the great variation over time in Jme's use of *-dem* plural constructions. On his three studio albums, he uses 50%, 0% and 50% *-dem* plurals respectively, and in the sample of his unscripted speech *-dem* plurals were absent altogether. This does not create any sort of clear pattern for Jme individually. Instead, it shows a rather high degree of inconsistency. The same can be pointed out on a different scale in that the aforementioned family relationship between Skepta and Jme is not at all reflected in the frequencies of Creole language in their song lyrics. All in all, the data is consistently inconsistent, and proves an essential point regarding my thesis question: The use of Creole is for grime artists, and (given the heterogeneity of 'MLE speakers' as a group) probably also for other MLE speakers, largely based on freedom of choice. This freedom of choice is exercised within their individual registers, which include both mainstream and Creole variants.

Judging from the above data analysis, the controlling factors behind these choices appear to be, in general terms, *identity* and *context*. The lyrics of the individual artists of Boy Better Know display a wide spectrum of topics and moods, and the artists themselves tend to exhibit various characteristics. Collectively, Boy Better Know as a group emerges as a combination of a variety of artistic personas. The most obvious example of this is Skepta and Jme, who as brothers may be expected to not only be closely related in terms of linguistic input from home, but also to some degree connected as artistic personas. Reading from the Adenuga brothers' biographies and song lyrics, these expectations seem to be unfulfilled. This is the primary reason why I choose to focus on Jme and Skepta also in terms of identity. The fact that they are brothers is not necessarily relevant here. However, the fact that they express highly differing artistic identities might help explain the large gap between their individual use of Creole linguistic features. While Skepta, as shown in examples (1) and (2), on

numerous occasions describes drug distribution and threats of gun use, Jme describes himself as a non-smoking, pacifistic vegan with a university degree (examples 3-6).

(1) Packs[12], I sold, had them buzzing[13] on the road[14]
Crack[15] residue in the buttons on my phone

(Skepta featuring Young Lord – *It Ain't Safe*)

(2) Nah, you can't diss[16] my mum
Shots start fly out and man [will] get bun[17]
[…]
I hate man like a nun[18]
That's why I wanna buy a haunted[19] gun

(Skepta featuring Chip & Wiley – *Corn on the Curb*)

(3) All the shit you do I've done but I ain't touched alcohol in a while
I used to blaze[20], I turned 21 then I dropped the munk[21] out just like Jahmaal[22]

(Jme – *Work*)

(4) I ain't buss[23] one gunshot in my life
But I'm still standing here

(Jme – *JME*)

[12] 'packs of marijuana'
[13] 'popular'
[14] 'on the street'
[15] 'cocaine'
[16] 'make fun of'
[17] 'burnt'
[18] here 'celibacy is associated with hatred towards men'
[19] either 'used' or 'unregistered'
[20] 'smoke marijuana'
[21] 'marijuana'
[22] According to Genius.com contributor thejzaconnect, this is a reference to "fellow grime artist Jahmaal Noel Fyffe, also known as Chip, [who] was formerly known as Chipmunk, [and] dropped the 'Munk' from his name".
[23] 'haven't busted/taken'

(5) Apologies to all aquariums
But I roll with couple [of] pescetarians, vegans and vegetarians
An'[24] a few Rastafarians
Man don't wanna see no dead meat on their plate like some barbarians
(Jme – *No You Ain't*)

(6) How could a man with a uni degree
Be bussing up [a] mic and chatting his greaze[25]?
(Jme featuring Giggs – *Man Don't Care*)

Using and selling drugs and being acquainted with gun violence are typically part of an artistic image that signalizes roughness and ruthlessness, in the vein of 1990s American West Coast gangsta rap artists and 2000s/10s Southern state trap artists. Both gangsta rap and trap have been, and are to some extent still, highly popular as music genres, and the 'gangster' identity associated with these genres has influenced artists from other genres, such as R&B singer The Weeknd and, possibly, grime artists like Skepta. On the opposite end of the identity spectrum, drug abstinence, pacifism, veganism and higher education are typically not associated with roughness or 'gangster' identity. The fact that both Skepta and Jme explicitly describe these traits and qualities in their planned speech patterns signifies that there is a high degree of willingness among artists to portray themselves as certain personas. A number of artists *wish* to express their personalities and will in many cases seek to use language that enforces this expression of personality. From the listener's perspective, an artist's personality can be expected to be received in a more cohesive and complete fashion if the artist expresses himself in the way the listener expects him to express himself.

Considering these facts in the light of Skepta's considerably higher use of Creole language than his younger brother, it seems reasonable that Creole is believed to be

[24] 'and'
[25] 'talking about nothing in particular'

associated with a rough, ‘gangster’-type identity. This also appears to be the case with Shorty, who in his lyrics also boasts about guns and drug use, as in examples 7-8.

(7) I don't lie about guns like an eediat[26]
I don't lie about things that I don't do
Fam[27] I don't lie on the streets like these tramps
Never had a cosh[28] and I had about 3 shanks[29]
Raving[30] with straps[31] while doing some deep skanks[32]
(Shorty – *Whats Goin On*)

(8) Sitting in bed, lying awake, with a spliff[33] the size of my face
I quit smoking about five times last week, but fam[34], I just like the taste
(Shorty – *Verified*)

The fact that Shorty is the MC that displays the second highest percentage of overall Creole use in his lyrics conforms well with the assumption that “more Creole equals more gangster” and appears to further enforce this hypothesis.

One Boy Better Know artist whose lyrics and (former) lifestyle do not conform with this hypothesis, however, is Wiley. Having been involved in gang violence and illegal drug trade, and allegedly having been stabbed twenty times in his life (Not For The Radio 2016), Wiley expresses this ‘hardship’ on numerous occasions in his song lyrics (examples 9-10).

[26] ‘idiot’
[27] short for ‘family’, usually used to describe closeness to other people
[28] ‘baton’
[29] ‘knives’
[30] ‘clubbing’/’partying’
[31] ‘gun(s)’
[32] Skanking is a dance move associated with ska and reggae music
[33] ‘cigarette containing marijuana’
[34] See footnote 22.

(9) So much has happened, from fights to gun clapping
And wars and street stabbings, I'd need to settle down

(Wiley – *Mystery Girl*)

(10) Drugs on the staircase, drugs in the bait lift, every day I weight lift
Cops and robbers wanna take it, I hate it

(Wiley – *Speakerbox*)

Concerning the potential relationship between roughness and use of Creole, Wiley appears to directly contradict the hypothesis. Being the MC with the lowest frequencies of Creole in his lyrics, he represents an identity in several of his songs that does not fit the picture that was partly drawn with the examples from lyrics by Skepta, Jme and Shorty.

The factors that seem to drive the use of Creole in the lyrics of each artist and member of Boy Better Know appear to be highly individual, and this study has not yet brought forth any consistent pattern that shows how the artists' individual uses of Creole are related. This illustrates a high level of individuality in the processes that lay behind each member's linguistic choices. More specifically relating to my thesis question, this study has illustrated that MLE used in grime lyrics is anything but strictly bound to ethnic background. This is highlighted by the very first quote on page 1, which is a 2017 tweet by Boy Better Know MC Frisco, posted on his Twitter account @BigFris: "Couple rappers need to work on their patois still". In his tweet, Frisco states that some rappers or MCs should pay closer attention to their *patois* (Jamaican Creole). When Frisco, himself being an MC and informant in this study, suggests that using Creole is something grime artists need to pay attention to, it highlights how the scripted nature of grime lyrics allows MCs to make deliberate choices about how they depict themselves and others in the grime community. It also points to the possibility that rappers of non-Jamaican background use language that they may not be familiar with, which highlights that MLE, as most language varieties, are works in progress and in constant motion.

This study has found considerable variation between artists of similar ethnic backgrounds, and, perhaps surprisingly, the individual using the most of the five selected

features from Jamaican Creole in his lyrics (Skepta) is not of Jamaican origin at all. Simultaneously, the same individual's younger brother (Jme) is among the least frequent Creole users based on the same parameters. The three artists that are of Jamaican heritage (Jammer, Frisco and Shorty) all place themselves around the middle of the list of the most frequent Creole users. These results, although they are at first glance surprising, must be seen in the light of their context, and it must be considered that the song lyrics classify as scripted speech. The results from the unscripted speech data with the artists show that Creole use is scarce, and the results form neither a clear conformation nor a contradiction of the results from the scripted speech data. However, the former shows just how scarce Creole use appears to be in these artists' unscripted speech, thus making it reasonable to claim that the uses of Creole in these six artists' scripted speech is all about code-switching and creating an external identity. Ethnic background appears to be absent or playing a secondary role in this creation process, and the way MLE is used and expressed in grime lyrics thus appears to be based on multiethnolectality and not ethnic background or nationality. The language patterns of the six informants in this study appear to bear witness of enregisterment in MLE, with the late emergence of Creole features in Wiley's song lyrics as the clearest sign of this.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to answer the thesis question 'To what degree do grime lyrics illustrate and confirm the multiethnolectality of MLE, specifically relating to Jamaican English vocabulary and grammar?' To answer this question, I have selected five linguistic features that are either mandatory or frequent in Jamaican English and/or British Creole and that also appear to have a somewhat wide distribution in MLE. The selected five features are 1. post-nominal plural marker *-dem*; 2. copula constructions (zero copula / *a* copula); 3. *a* as an auxiliary marking future reference; 4. verb chaining; and 5. *wagwan* 'what's going on'. For this study, I gathered speech data from six informants, all members of Boy Better Know, a collective of London-based grime MCs of a variety of ethnic backgrounds, where three of the MCs are of Jamaican descent (Jammer, Frisco and Shorty, two are of Nigerian descent (Skepta and Jme), and one is of Trinidadian descent (Wiley).

The scripted speech data consisted of all studio albums released by Boy Better Know MCs from 2004 (when Wiley's first album was released) to the present, Wiley's 2017 effort *Godfather* being the latest release to be included in the data set.[35] For each of the five linguistic features, I have provided tables showing how a feature is distributed within the lyrics of each MC's back catalogue. The results of the total token count for each artist have thereafter been compared with regards to each MC's background. In order to determine whether the results from the collection of scripted speech data are affected by the planned nature of the data, I have also collected unscripted speech data in the form of interviews with the MCs, all found on YouTube.

The results of the data collection point towards a tendency that having Jamaican national and linguistic background does not necessarily affect the extent to which a speaker uses Creole language, at least not in the case of the five features that have been selected here. The most frequent use of Creole is found in song lyrics by Skepta, who is of Nigerian

[35] In April 2018, Wiley released the album *Godfather II*, which at the time of writing is too recent to be included in this thesis.

descent. Apart from this, there is a marginal tendency for higher frequencies of Creole in artists that have Jamaican roots. However, the fact that Jme, who, like his bigger brother Skepta, is born to Nigerian-born parents hints that there are other factors at play than nationality and the language spoken in each MC's home. In an attempt to find clearer patterns regarding what might be the direct causes of certain artists using more Creole than others, I suggested that age, origin and/or residence, and commercial popularity may have been important factors in the formation of each MC's lyric identity. However, a closer investigation of the impact of these factors does not appear to provide any clear answers as to what the instrumental force behind the relatively large variation in use of Creole between the six MCs might be.

However, the collection of unscripted data may give us a hint about the underlying causes. The use of Creole linguistic features during the interviews proved to be very low overall. This signals that the use of Creole for many MCs, and perhaps also for other MLE speakers, is a series of more or less conscious and deliberate choices. The resulting speech acts may be attributed to each speaker's wish to portray themselves as belonging to a certain speech community and identity. MLE can for young Londoners be used as a tool to identify themselves as young, urban, and, perhaps in most cases, black or of immigrant background. It is then perhaps to be expected that the six informants in my study tend to use MLE-like Creole features more frequently in scripted speech than in unscripted speech. Their song lyrics are public and accessible to the listener, and in this way grime MCs may contribute to spreading Creole language in contact with their audience. Spreading of Creole may in many of these cases mean spreading of identity, which is a core value in popular music and youth culture.

The impact of Jamaican-originated Creole language features on grime lyrics and MLE appears to be twofold: 1) The language used in grime song lyrics reflects the speech patterns used by MLE speakers to perform *acts of identity*; and 2) The language used in grime song lyrics is spread as a result of the public nature and accessibility of the music. Listeners that want to identify with the musicians, in many cases people who are already MLE speakers, may adopt speech patterns that previously were absent in their everyday

speech. In a process of *enregisterment*, individual adoption of speech patterns may result in a gradual sedimentation of these patterns in the collective speech patterns of a community belonging to a particular social domain, like the grime community. Possible evidence of this is found in the fact that all six informants have tended to use more Creole features in their lyrics over time. This tendency is especially striking when it comes to Wiley, the oldest of the informants, who showcases little to no use of Creole-like language features in his earlier releases, and over time has used increasing amounts of Creole.

To conclude, the results of this study appear to indicate that factors such as nationality and ethnic background have little to no direct influence on the degree to which grime MCs use Creole in their speech patterns, and that use of Creole is largely grounded in questions of identity. Regarding the research question, the use of Creole-like language in grime lyrics appears to confirm MLE's multiethnolectality with regards to typically Jamaican language features. At the same time, it should be noted that this study is limited in terms of scale, as it is based on speech data from no more than six informants.

6.1.Suggestions for future research

When gathering background material in the early stages of writing this master thesis, I was surprised by the relatively small volume of previous linguistic research on Multicultural London English and grime music in general. Considering both the rising popularity of grime music and the relatively fast emergence of MLE in recent years, I consider it of urgent importance that these topics are given considerable interest in coming years. The potentially wide spread of both grime music and linguistic tendencies of MLE in today's online environment should be considered significant. To fully establish the connection between British Creole and MLE, I wish for an extensive survey of MLE speakers and the frequencies of a wider range of language features than what is provided here. The evolution of language in the popular music of recent years is also a topic on which I have had difficulties finding extensive linguistic research. For many young speakers of English, in English-speaking

communities as well as non-English-speaking communities, song lyrics are one of the most important venues for language. Considering then the potential impact of grime music on many speakers of MLE, I would like to conclude this section and my thesis as a whole by urging linguists to continue taking seriously the language of young speakers and the impact of popular culture, young people's language being the place where linguistic innovation is happening (Tagliamonte 2016) and music being an important source of linguistic input.

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Discography

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